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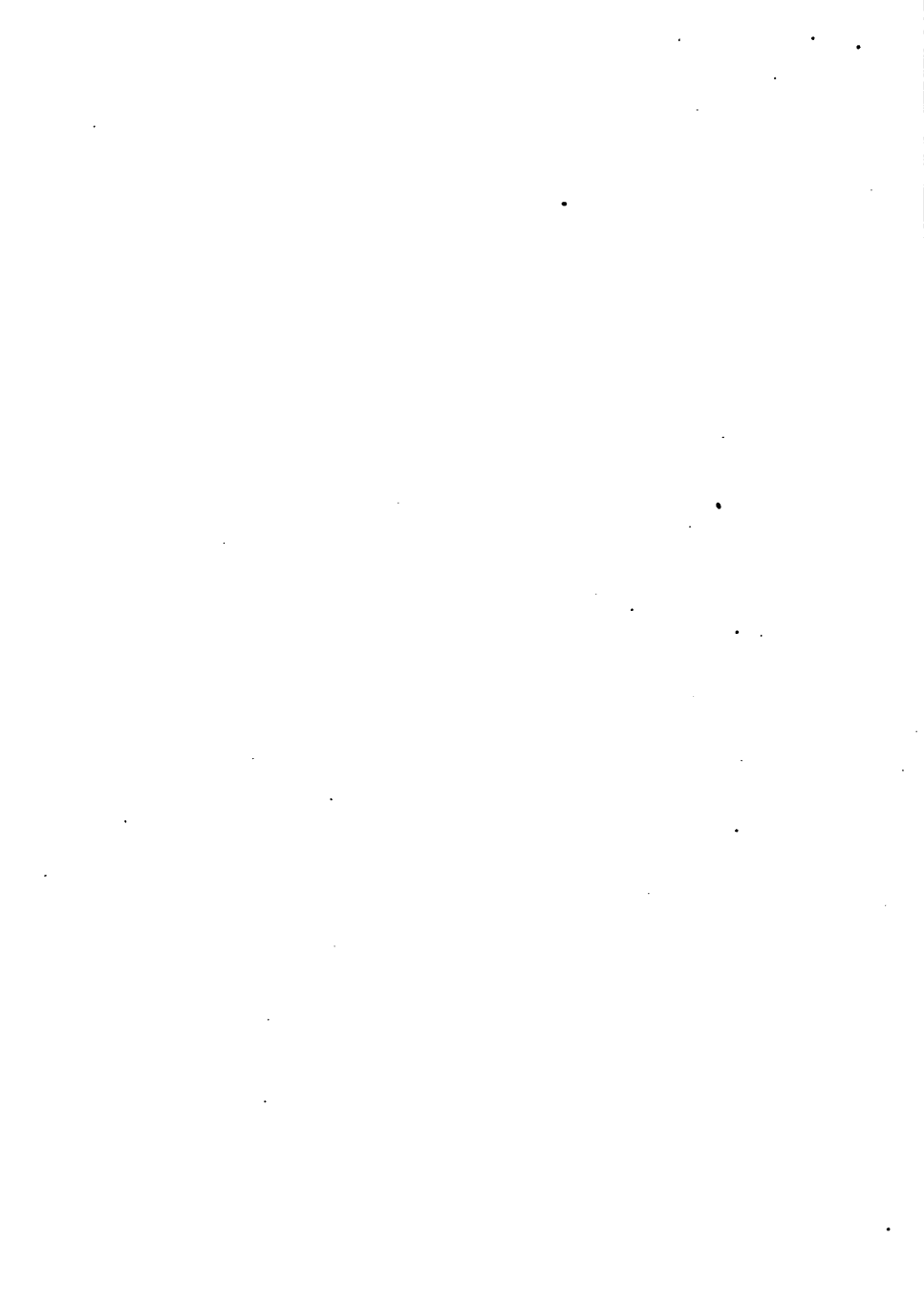
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FAIRY PRINCE
FOLLOW-MY-LEAD.

Ballantyne Press

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"Hullo, old lady!" he said in a little flute-like voice, "you don't seem very comfortable."

Frontispiece.

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FAIRY PRINCE FOLLOW-MY-LEAD

OR

The Magic Bracelet

BY

EMILY E. READER

AUTHOR OF "VOICES FROM FLOWER-LAND: A BIRTHDAY BOOK AND
LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS"

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM READER

ENGRAVED BY MESSRS. FORD AND WALL



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TO MY LITTLE READERS.

ONE winter's eve, when smooth white snow
Over the roofs and pavement lay,
Three children sat by the fire's glow
Weary of lessons—tired of play.
“Please, Mother, put your work away ;
Tell us a Fairy Tale,” said they.

Then Mother began th' usual strain
Of how Cind'rella lost her shoe :
“We don't want that old tale again ;
We wish you'd tell us something *new*,
Something we've never heard. *Please do.*”
And what she told them—I'll tell you.

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Fairy Prince Follow-my-Lead.



CHAPTER I.



ANY years ago, in a little village called Noake, there lived a poor widow and her grand-daughter, then about eleven years old—a nice, intelligent little girl, with deep blue eyes, golden curly hair, and the merriest smile to be seen for many a long mile around.

All the neighbours had a good word for little Ellen, and many were the apples Farmer Brown smuggled into her pockets at picking time, when she happened to be passing near his orchard.

Poor little Ellen didn't have a very pleasant life of it, for her grandmother was dreadfully hard to please.

"As sour a crab as ever I see," said Betsey Smith, her *next-door* neighbour—although a whole lane ran between them, for Grumpy Margery's cottage was at one end and Betsey Smith's at the other; but that is pretty close quarters for a village like Noake, where houses seem to be thrown down to take root just where they will. True, there was one little street—High Street, it was called—near the church, mostly composed of shops, but that was a good threequarters of a mile from Betsey's, and in consequence a little farther from Grumpy Margery's—but all the way there, at long intervals, you would see cottages sprinkled about with no road to get at them by. This was rather inconvenient in wet weather, as people might stick in the mud by the way.

Now Margery kept her cottage very clean, although it was by far the worst furnished in the village. Yet many people said she must be putting by a tidy lot of money in some old stocking or other; for she never had been known to spend a penny in the village, even on Feast-days. And many were the shillings which found their way into old Margery's pocket from those well-to-do farmers' wives who

employed her for stocking-knitting, and any very particular job of fine laundry-work that needed more care than usual; for Margery had been very clever at such tasks in her younger days, and although she couldn't undertake great things now, because she was getting rather infirm owing to the rheumatics in one of her legs, which sometimes compelled her to use crutches, still what she did she did well, and was well paid for it. She had a cow, too, which an old farmer had left her in his will; and he had been so thoughtful of her necessities as to lay his successor under tribute, that when it became too old to give milk, if Margery were still alive, he should take it and give her another in good milking condition instead. And another farmer who had known her all his life, considering how poor and helpless she was, and what a sweet little companion she had in Ellen, let her use his paddock without paying rent for it, as a help towards feeding this cow; and morning after morning, wet or fine, poor little Ellen would come trudging down the lane with her milk-pails yoked on to her shoulders, and her sweet happy face like a beam of living sunshine peeping out from under her large old-fashioned pink and white cotton sun-bonnet. Often she sang as she went along, and no one of the villagers ever passed by her but

cordial greetings were exchanged between them, and she hurried off to her morning task happier than ever. After milking was over, and Brownie—that was the cow's name—was properly attended to according to the weather, Ellen would start off with her pails to take milk to those whom she served in the village, making her way back to her grandma's cottage by another road.

And then began poor Ellen's hardest task—the dairy-work, her grandma scolding, threatening, and grumbling all the time. Nothing her little willing hands tried to do but there was something wrong about it. Many and many a tear dropped on her coarse white apron as she hurried over her task, all the while fearing that heavy crutch, which so often fell on her defenceless shoulders, leaving black bruises behind it.

After this task was done, Ellen had her scanty breakfast, a cup of water with a few drops of yesterday's skim milk poured in to colour it, and a crust of bread which the old lady could not eat herself, because, as she said, her teeth were so bad. Little Ellen was cheerful in spite of this poor fare, and would have been quite contented if her grandma had chosen to let her have it in peace. But unfortunately there was nothing the old soul liked to hear so much as her own voice—and nothing her voice loved to talk about so much as her own sufferings

and wrongs. And as a large share of those were put down to poor Ellen's account, she was daily and hourly reminded of her faults and ingratitude, so that at last the child preferred to eat her crust of bread while she fed the fowls, and would never take a meal sitting down.

After breakfast Ellen was sent to the grocer's in the village, with eggs and butter, and any cabbages or fruit the garden produced. Dame Margery never reserved any for her own or Ellen's use, and whatever food came into their poor little cottage from the butcher's, baker's, or general shop, was all bartered for by this meek little girl in exchange for either butter, eggs, or milk. Margery held money sacred to herself, and she never parted with a halfpenny to anybody.

Now one day when Ellen had been gone a long time into the village, the old Dame began to stump about the uneven floor, working herself into a temper, grumbling aloud and bemoaning her hard fate, although there was no one to hear but herself. Suddenly she fell over a little three-legged stool, which stood by the fireplace, and in the fall her crutches crossed underneath her in such a way that she was not able to get up again until some one should come and help her.

Now it chanced that morning that Ellen had been sent with some cabbages to exchange for a loaf of bread at the baker's—no nasty indigestible new bread, such as you and I are fond of eating, but the very stalest he had got, which of course would be cheaper than the other. She had just put this loaf into her big basket, leaving two cabbages on the counter in payment, and was going out of the shop when the baker suddenly took out of a little drawer, just under his side of the counter, two delicious-looking sugary cakes, and with a merry look in his bright eyes gave them to Ellen. A quick flush of pleasure came over her cheeks. As she was going to put them into her basket, he kindly stopped her by saying—

“Eat them here, now, little Ellen ; I'll not let you leave the shop till you have finished 'em. I know well enough what that old skinflint up yonder feeds you upon. Eat them up, my girl, and get a few minutes' quiet from her nagging tongue. I can't think for the life of me how you put up with it, and yet always look as pleasant as a May chicken.”

“I'm *afraid* to stay,” said Ellen ; “I'll eat them as I go along. Thank you, very much. She'll be *so* angry if I'm late. Oh ! please, sir, *do* let me go !”

But the baker would not listen.

“Nonsense, little girl,” he said ; “a few seconds

more or less can't make much difference. Eat away, my child, and have some more when you've finished those ; you'll be able to bear her nagging better on a full stomach than on an empty one, and that's the case with you most times, to be sure. Here, clap these cabbages in your bag again, we don't want 'em this morning, and tell her I gave you the loaf ; p'raps you can make some other bargain with them in the village, and that will put her in a good humour for once. Don't look so afraid, little 'un, you are doing no sin," for all this while poor Ellen had been cramming down the cakes as fast as she could with a very frightened look upon her face. The last morsel was just disappearing when an unlucky crumb went the wrong way. Ellen was nearly choked with coughing ; the baker ran to get some water, which she swallowed in great haste, thanked him for all his kindness, and ran off towards the other shops, for Ellen had remembered while eating her cakes that Dame Margery wanted some more worsted to finish the last pair of stockings she had been knitting for Farmer Beans, and as the good-natured baker had returned the cabbages, Ellen knew it would please her grandma to get it. Out of breath, she presently stopped at the little general shop which supplied the villagers with anything and everything. There were

three people waiting to be served ; but edging sideways up to the counter she said to Miss Prudy, in a tremulous voice—

“ Please, Miss, will you take some cabbages for a skein of grey worsted for grandma, the same as the last ? I’m dreadfully late, to-day ; she’ll thrash me if I stop another minute. Oh, please, Miss, will you serve me now ? ” And as Miss Prudy always pitied the poor child, she gave her the worsted, and Ellen was soon off again.

About half a mile from the village a pretty little black dog ran out of the hedge and barked at Ellen, trying to catch her by the skirt of her frock, and pull her towards a small shed close by. Ellen could not resist the pleading look in this dumb creature’s eyes, so ran towards the shed with it, and there on some loose straw lay a little brown-faced, blue-eyed baby, nearly naked, but seemingly happy enough, as it kicked its little plump legs about enjoying the exercise.

Ellen could not see any one near to whom it might belong, so stood looking at it for a few minutes, wondering whatever she had better do. Then, suddenly remembering her grandmother, she started off, running to Farmer Bean’s house, quite a quarter of a mile back, and there told one of the

servants about that little baby which lay all alone, almost without clothes, in the shed, with only a small black dog to guard it. Off again she ran faster than ever; but just before reaching Smith's lane, her foot caught in a rut on the road and down she fell, twisting her tiny ankle in such a way as to cause great pain. She raised herself up, but found it impossible to walk fast, and the tears began to run down her flushed face. Just as she was passing Betsey Smith's back garden, a good-natured little chubby boy, who was leaning over the fence chewing a flower-stem, called out to his mother, who was busy hanging out washing a little way from him—

"Mummy, mummy, come e-ere—Ellen's a-crying; she's hurted her poor foot, mummy." And Betsey ran to the gate, fetched her in, saying kindly—

"Don't cry, dear, we'll soon make it better. Poor little girl!" And then she bathed the swollen ankle with cold spring water, and bandaged it tightly up, and started her once more towards home. By this time it *was* dreadfully late, and 'twould be no wonder if the old Dame scolded her soundly. Ellen's heart began to beat very fast as she got near the cottage. There was a loud noise, like a lot of creaking wheels working on one another coming from it; she could hear the sound a long way off.

"Oh dear, oh dear," thought Ellen, "whatever is the matter with poor old grandma?" The longer she listened the louder the noise became, until, too much afraid to enter by herself, she limped back again to her kind friend, Betsey Smith, and begged her to come with her, for she really *dared* not go in by herself.

The good woman was truly sorry for the poor child, but could not leave her little family alone, so she said to Ellen—

"You stop here and look after Charlie and Bill, while I just run down and find out what's the matter. It's likely I'll be more help nor you if anything ails her, and if she's only grumpy, why, I'll take care to leave her none the sourer for my visit, so you can set your mind easy. Be sure and take care of the young 'uns, dear, and if father or Ted comes in from the fields, tell them I'll be back in a jiffy." And off Betsey started, leaving Ellen in charge.



CHAPTER II.



HE left Ellen taking care of Betsey Smith's children at one end of the lane. Now we must take a peep into Dame Margery's cottage, at the other, and see what is the matter with her. She had been struggling to get on to her shaky legs again for full twenty minutes, which seemed a much longer time to her, and she had pulled the old arm-chair on the top of her in her efforts to raise herself by the front of its seat. Presently a knock came at the door.

"Come in," says Grumpy Margery, looking wistfully at the latch, hoping to see it lift at some outside touch; but as her voice was very cracked, and not in its proper focus, coming at the time from only a foot or two above the floor, the visitor didn't answer but kept on knocking.

"Come in!" shouted the Dame, getting very angry. Still the door latch remained untouched, and the old lady worked herself into a greater rage than ever, for she had earnestly hoped it might be some kind neighbour who had called upon her, and whom she could ask to lift her up from her uncomfortable position on the floor. The fear that the visitor might go away without her being able to make herself heard lent her voice more power as she shrieked rather than shouted, "Lift the latch and come in, can't ye? What in the world do ye stand there knocking for? Can't ye see the latch, you stupid!"

Still the door remained closed, and still the knocking went on. The poor old lady turned helplessly on that side nearest the window, and saw what took away her breath for astonishment. There sat a most curious little figure perched on the edge of a flower-pot, with her own beautiful myrtle-tree in full bloom forming a background to him. His legs were very short and clothed in bright-red stockings, which came up ever so far above the knees, where they were met by a light-blue tunic. His head was round as an apple, with just one tuft of golden yellow hair standing bolt upright on the top of it, and his eyes were black as sloes, very sparkling, and as full of mischief as any two eyes could be. His nose was decidedly red and inclined to

turn up at the tip, and it had round outward-curved nostrils. A merry nose, if ever there was one in the world. The kind of nose that loves to poke into all sorts of amusing corners, and root out every odd bit of mischief it can find. As for his mouth—words *cannot* describe the humour that played round it, even when he was *not* laughing, and it changed its expression every minute, yet never lost any of its merriment.

“Hullo, old lady!” he said in a little flute-like voice, “you don’t seem very comfortable. I’d get down and help you, only you look so savage. I might have all my bones broken if I did. Did you ever laugh in your life, I wonder? I don’t *really* believe you can. Let’s see,” and with that he burst out laughing.

“Eh, eh, eh, ah, ah, ah!” laughed the old lady, much against her will; and very rusty the laugh sounded, but it still kept on—the little man leading her harsh notes with his silvery bell-like treble, and beating time with his tiny feet, until both were in a perfect frenzy of mirth.

Again the knocking commenced; the only answer was a peal of laughter, quite loud enough to be heard, and this time the door opened.

“Oh, if you please, Dame Margery, mother’s sent you a nice bit of pork for your dinner; our pig

was killed last Wednesday, you know. Dear me," broke in the child, a little girl of about Ellen's age—"how you are laughing! Is it so funny to fall down, Dame Margery? Let me help you up again." But before she could catch hold of the old woman's outstretched hand, she caught sight of the comical little fellow, who sat rocking himself backwards and forwards on the edge of the flower-pot. One glance was enough. "Eh, eh, eh!" laughed the child, the tears beginning to run down her cheeks, and her sides aching with laughter, but quite unable to move or check herself. Presently some one passing by looked in to see the cause of such an unusual noise—a big farm-labouring man he was, with heavy limbs, and huge shoulders covered up in an ill-fitting smock-frock.

"Why, what be the matter, Dame?" he said. "Rolling on the flu-er, and alaughing ready to bust; here, git up, carn't ye, and speak to a mun? And you, little un, what be it all about? Come, Dame, if you want to laugh, set up and do it." And taking her in one of his strong arms, and setting the chair on its legs again with the other, thumped her down in it with a bang. The next instant he *too* caught sight of that merry sprite sitting on the flower-pot, and off went the jolly labourer into fits of laughter,

so loud and strong that they seemed to shake the ceiling, and threatened to bring it down upon their heads. But the curious part of it all was that they quite forgot what they were going to do the instant before, and set about this laughing business in thorough right-down earnest. Poor Betsey Smith came next, and she immediately began to join in. The parson, too—a thin, lank, hungry-looking man, whose very smiles seemed to freeze on their way from his heart to his lips—walked into the cottage with a stern, reproving frown on his pale face.

“What is this all about, Dame Margery?” he asked.

Then came a pause, during which every one seemed to choke, and the laughter burst out louder than ever. Nobody was able to answer him.

“Have you all lost your senses?” said the parson once more, looking round in angry amazement; but at this instant he too caught sight of the funny little figure sitting on Dame Margery’s flower-pot. And to hear the parson laugh was worth a ten miles’ walk on a wet day, even in Noake, where the roads are specially muddy. A fat old woman with a baby in her arms came next, and began the chorus directly; but the funniest thing of all was to see that little six weeks’ old baby twisting its tiny features into

a laugh, and with its toothless mouth following all the expressions of the mischievous imp as well as it was able. There were ten of them in all, busily engaged in laughing as loudly as they could, and acting precisely like the Fairy. All at once they stopped. Each one looked at the other, as if suddenly waked up out of a dream. The Dame found her tongue again, and asked what they *all* wanted there. Nobody seemed to know, except the little girl and Mrs. Smith. The other visitors slunk out of her cottage like so many dogs with burnt tails, hardly saying, "Morning, Dame," as they passed through the door into the sunny lane outside. And this wonderful change had been caused by the laughing sprite, whom we shall in future call Prince Follow-my-Lead, disappearing mysteriously. But what astonished them was that, although every one kept their eyes fixed on him all the time, nobody saw him go.





CHAPTER III.

WHEN Ellen got home at last, Grumpy Margery did not scold her for her long absence, as she expected; but instead of this looked very serious and altogether occupied with her thoughts, for a curious idea had got into the old Dame's head somehow. She almost expected to find that the Laughing Imp who had sat upon the edge of her flower-pot was either some cunning thief, or a clockwork puppet employed by one, to find out where she kept her little hoard of money, so she hurried poor Ellen off again as soon as possible, telling

her that she must go to the mill, which was about half a mile away, to fetch some pollard for the fowls. Ellen looked very ruefully at her grandmother, knowing it would be a hard task for her to get there and back, with her swollen ankle aching and throbbing all the while ; yet she made no excuse or complaint, but unhooking her basket from its peg behind the door, started limping away. The moment she had disappeared the old woman hobbled to the door and bolted it, latched her window, pulled down the blind so that no one could see in, and then began to turn over the cushions of her chair. From one of them she took out a key.

With this in her hand she went to a little table which stood by the side of the fireplace—listened a minute, for there were heavy footsteps coming near the cottage, then the voices of people passing ; and after these sounds had died away in the distance, she lifted up the tablecover and unlocked a drawer which pulled out a very little way. Then touching a secret spring in the side of it, out flew a piece of wood and showed a narrow space extending underneath the table as far as arm could reach. Fixed in the mouth of this lay an old ruler, with different coloured worsteds thickly twisted round it ; this she pulled out, and to every piece of coloured worsted

hung a bag of its own colour. First she took the red one and poured its contents on an old silk handkerchief she had carefully spread upon the table for that purpose. It contained *gold*; this she counted out in heaps of tens, and being satisfied that none was missing, carefully put it back again. Then the blue bag, which had nothing but silver in it, she emptied on the handkerchief—counted, and dropped piece by piece into its own bag. The yellow one had copper in it. This she served the same, and tied the three bags to the ruler as before, then slid off the fourth, a purple one. This she opened at its mouth, and putting her hand in took out a pile of dirty yellow-looking bank-notes. These she counted on her fingers, very slowly, according to their amount; and after tying this bag up with the others on the ruler, was just going to put them into their hiding-place again, when knock, knock, knock, came at the door. Hastily the old woman shut up the drawer, locked it, set the table in order, and was hurriedly arranging the cushions of her chair when another rat-tat-tat made her hobble to the door as fast as she could, and opening it she pretended to be just woke up from a nap, and began rubbing her eyes as the light streamed into the cottage. Just outside stood Farmer Beans.

“Why, Dame,” he said, “how be you? Where’s

little Ellen? I came to see her. This morning Sammy tells me that she came running up all out of breath with a queer sort of tale about some little 'un a-laying in my shed at Mill Point. Well, the missus clapt on her bonnet, and was off in a jiffy; but when she got there, there warn't no signs of anythink of the sort, and says she, 'If it wur any other child than Ellen that came here and told us, why, I should think directly it were some trick or other;' but the missus sets a sight of store by Ellen, and she sent me to find out the rights of it. You says she be gone down to the mill, Dame? I be going that way; maybe I'll ketch her up, and hear for myself what she's got to say about it. 'Pears as if there's a sort of mystery somewhere's," and the stout ruddy-faced farmer scratched his bald head. "Sposen *you* don't happen to know how it was, Dame?"

But the old woman only shook her head. "Ellen never tells me nothink," she said, in a grumbling voice. "I'd just as lief be miles and miles away in a forest; I should know about as much of what's going on as I do here. If Betsey Smith didn't step in now and then for a chat, all the parish might die off and I be none the wiser. Ellen looks pretty and smiling enough to other people, but she keeps all her sour looks and temper at home for her poor old grand-

mother, like the rest of 'em ; they're all a thankless lot. Look at her mother, Lucy Cole that was, all so simpering and sweet, as if sugar wouldn't melt in her mouth, till she'd married my Bill and then—O Law !—but she's been dead nigh on ten years now, and poor Bill gone nine ; he never held up his head agen after she were dead, and there was I left with a young babby as couldn't walk—that's Ellen, you know—and a precious hard time I had of it. What with the young 'un to keep, and Bill's illness—to pay for doctors and one mess and another—my fingers were pretty nigh worn to the bone, I can tell you. Ah, it's a world of toil and trouble, Joshua Beans, I tells you. You has the best of it, you men."

But Farmer Beans had by this time risen from his seat by the old woman, and going towards the door, held out his hand with a jovial—

"Good-bye, Dame, I must be off ; time and tide don't stay for no man, as they say. Young Jem's waiting for me up the lane with the trap. I'm main glad to see you be looking so well, Dame," and with another very broad smile he started off without waiting to hear any more of her complaints.

Not far from there he met poor Ellen limping along with a heavy basket full of pollard. Luckily for her, before she had been many yards from her grand-

mother's cottage she met the miller in his little cart, and he gave her a lift, so she knew the Dame would not expect her just yet.

"Hallo, young woman!" shouted Farmer Beans, trying to look very severe, "I want to speak a word or two to you. What about that little un as you said was a-laying in my shed this morning? Missus went down as fast as her two legs could carry her, and there warn't anythink of the kind there. Now what do you mean by it, Miss?" laying hold of Ellen by the shoulders and making a pretence of shaking her, then suddenly bursting out laughing as he saw the puzzled look on her face.

"No baby there?" said Ellen. "Oh, but you must be mistaken; as sure as I live, there was really one there. Mr. Beans, you must think me very wicked to come and deceive you so, if you couldn't find it. But, oh dear, I'm quite sure I couldn't have made a mistake; a little black dog was with it; he almost dragged me to the shed, or I shouldn't have known anything about it. Oh! how I wish I had never seen him!" said Ellen with a little sob, for Farmer Beans and his wife had always been very kind to her, and it seemed so mean for her to have given them all this trouble for nothing; besides, she was very tired, and her poor little ankle ached so that two bright tears

stood in Ellen's eyes an instant. These were quickly followed by more and more, till she sat down on a piece of stone by the roadside and began having a real good cry.

At this moment a gipsy's waggon came in sight at the village end of the lane. It was covered with cradles, chairs, and lots of other things made of basket-work, and came slowly towards the farmer as he stood trying to comfort poor little Ellen. When it was only a few yards from them a small black dog ran up to her and began sniffing at her, and wagging its tail, as if it was very pleased to see her again, Ellen uncovered her eyes, for she had clasped her hands tightly over them, trying to hide her tears. Seeing him, she cried out to Farmer Beans—

“Here's the dog—the very dog, sir, which I saw this morning. The baby must belong to the gipsies, sir.”

And sure enough, sitting on the doorstep of the caravan was a ragged-looking young woman, nursing a tiny baby wrapped up in an old grey shawl.

“All right,” said the farmer, more than convinced that this explained all. “I'll tell the missus about it when I get home. Dry your eyes, little 'un, and I'll drive you back to your grandmother's.” And with sundry pats on the head and many smiles he lifted

her into his cart, and soon set her down again at the cottage door.

"Why, you *have come back soon*, Ellen," were her grandma's first words to her, as though it were something to be angry about. "Farmer Beans has been here asking all sorts of questions about some baby you saw this morning."

"Oh, I *know*, grandma," said Ellen. "It was only a gipsy's baby after all. I saw it again just now with its mother in the lane."

"Well, that wasn't much to make such a fuss about," replied the Dame. "I wonder Joshua Beans hedn't more sense."

Soon it came to be milking-time again, and off poor Ellen limped with her pails towards the little paddock where Brownie lived her life in ease and quietness. Ellen almost envied the cow this evening when she saw her gently cropping the bright grass, and whisking her tail lazily to keep off the flies.

"Oh, Brownie," she said, "you hav'n't a grandma like I have, and you're not obliged to keep running about with your poor foot aching like mine is—lucky Brownie!" And the poor dumb creature started up as she spoke, and came gently towards her, looking so tenderly at her with its soft brown eyes, and rubbing its warm nose against the poor little thin

brown arm that raised itself gently to stroke old Brownie's head.

Ellen was quite grateful in her heart for that dumb creature's fondness. She would have loved to be able to play with dear old Brownie, but the drudgery of her life was so constantly in her little mind that she seldom wasted even a few seconds for her own pleasure.

She had just finished her task, and was opening the paddock gate to go home, when a curious feeling caused her to look behind towards Brownie's shed, and there, standing between her milk-pails, was a most curious little fellow, with very bright eyes. Indeed, Ellen had never seen him before; and as she was wondering whoever he was, and wherever he could have come from, he said in a very soft and entreating voice—

“I am extremely thirsty, pretty little maiden; will you please give me some milk to drink?”

“Yes, certainly, sir,” said Ellen, almost afraid of her own voice, it sounded so loud and harsh in contrast to his. “But what will you drink it out of, please?—I have not got a cup with me. I'll hurry up to Widow Jones' and borrow one, if you'll stay here, sir,” said Ellen, feeling as if she should be glad to get away.

“Be quick back, that's all,” said the little man,

as he seated himself on the edge of one of her pails. "I'll sit here while you're gone. Don't tell any one what you want a cup for, nor say one word about me. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," meekly responded Ellen, as she limped off on her errand. "Oh dear, if he should spoil the milk while I'm away," she thought. "Or suppose he should be a thief come on purpose to steal milk, pails and all? I never saw such a tiny man in my life, nor one who looked so full of mischief. Dear, dear, what shall I do?" and she heaved a deep sigh. "How my heart beats! I can almost hear it. 'I must make haste,' he said. Oh please, Mrs. Jones, will you lend me a small cup?—I'll bring it back directly. Thank you, ma'am," and away she hurried with it; while Mrs. Jones, wondering whatever she wanted with it, sent her big boy to the end of the lane to find out, but Joe wouldn't hurry himself; he sauntered slowly away, had a game of marbles with some younger boys, and forgot all about Ellen.

In the meantime she had given a cup of milk to the little man, whom you will have guessed by now to be none other than the Prince Follow-my-Lead, who had made so much noise at Dame Margery's cottage in the morning. He received the milk from Ellen's hand with a low bow, took a deep draught, and

pretending that it was very nasty, he spit it all out again upon the grass, where it fell in rounded drops like tiny marbles. He bade Ellen pick them up. Meekly she stooped down, and what was her astonishment to find that they were solid and hard as stone. There were twenty of them; these she held out to him in the palm of her hand, but he only smiled, and said—"They are yours, Ellen, and you little know what they are worth; but we must string them up directly, for if you lost one it would be a dreadfully bad job." So he took off his little red cap, and there stood up the one tuft of yellow hair, which helped to make him look so comical. From this he pulled one long hair, and twisting the end of it in his fingers, passed it through each opaque ball, making it into a milk-white bead—Ellen handing him one after the other until he had threaded them all; these he wound round Ellen's arm to form a bracelet, and joined them by the same sort of twist with which he made the end firm enough to bore a hole through the beads. "And now," he said, "Ellen, you have only to wish, and at the same time touch the beads—then wait and see what will happen; but on no account take them off or lose them. If you do, some terrible misfortune will befall you."

"Oh dear," said Ellen, timidly, "I'm afraid grandma

will take them from me when I'm asleep, if she sees them. Please, sir, don't you think I had better not have these beads, in case I might break the string or anything, and lose some of them?"

"Oh no," said the little man, "we'll remedy that;" and he began singing such a curious song, that as he sang a crowd of bats flew in circles all round both Ellen and himself; he put out his hand, took one of them, and skinning off part of its wing, let it go, seeming none the worse. This thin skin he bound over Ellen's beads till it only looked like a wide cloth band; but it did not press into her wrist or hurt her in the least, neither could any one see the beads through it.

"If your grandma sees it, Ellen, she will only suppose that you have hurt your wrist and some kind neighbour has bound it up for you. She won't think twice about it, never fear," and hardly had these last words reached her ear than the merry imp, Follow-my-Lead, was nowhere to be seen.

Ellen seemed to think that she had been dreaming, but there were the milk-pails, the cup, and the band on her wrist. It really must be true; and as she stood thinking the clock struck seven.

"Oh, what will grandma say? I'm late again;" and she made one great effort to lift both pails at once, nearly falling over as she did so. "I wish I

had some one to do it for me," said the poor child, "my ankle aches so," and just at that moment Joe Jones came hurrying up the lane.

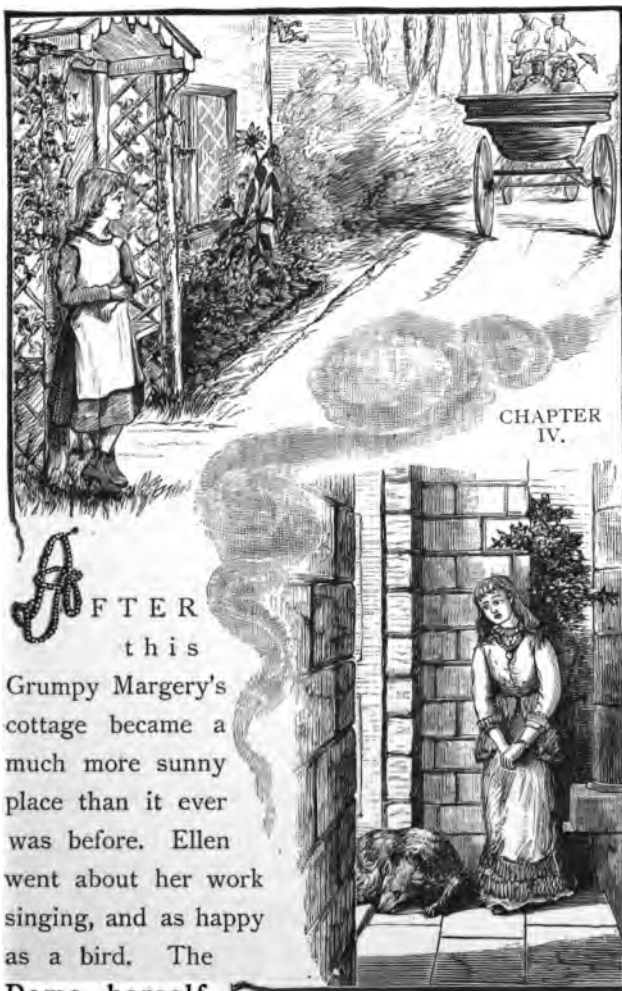
"Let me carry them pails for you, little un; you look tired to-night," he said. "How you do hobble, to be sure," as poor Ellen tried to keep pace with him. "What's the matter with your leg? Have you hurt it?"

Then Ellen told him of her fall, and so they went along together till they came to Grumpy Margery's. She was standing at her door watching, and seeing Ellen come limping along with Joe Jones carrying her pails she thought some accident had happened, and spoke more gently than usual to her as she went in. She asked about her ankle, and insisted upon seeing it. All this kindness was new to poor Ellen. She forgot that on her way home, while talking to Joe, she had said—"I *do* wish grandma wouldn't be so cross and unkind to me; I'm afraid to say anything ails me, if I'm ever so bad." Not one angry word escaped the Dame's lips that evening. She made Ellen have a nice supper of warm bread-and-milk and go to bed early, and what was more, actually *kissed* her when she said good-night, which made the tears of pleasure stand in those bright eyes, for she never remembered her grandma kissing her but once, and that was a very long time ago. How comfortable her little bed

seemed ! Yet as she was getting in, she said—"I wish my ankle was all right—I should be *so happy* then. Oh, how funny!—it really does feel better," and jumping off the bed, she put her little naked foot on the floor, pressed her whole weight on it, and then began to dance about, for it had left off hurting her. Yet the curious part of all was that she had quite forgotten what Fairy Follow-my-Lead had told her about the beads; she never once thought they had anything to do with the changes which happened.



BROWNIE.



CHAPTER
IV.

AFTER
this

Grumpy Margery's cottage became a much more sunny place than it ever was before. Ellen went about her work singing, and as happy as a bird. The Dame herself

seemed to be getting younger every day; she often

hobbled on her crutches down to the village. "Just to spare Ellen a bit," she said. And at last was actually known to spend a silver shilling at the general shop, to buy a little present for her. After this unusual extravagance on her part, the whole village was soon astir with the good news of Grumpy Margery's reformation. And so time went on much more pleasantly, until from spring it came to be autumn. One bright evening, as Ellen was standing at the cottage door watching for her grandma, who had gone into the village for something, she saw a carriage full of ladies—visitors to the Great White House on the Hill—pass by, on their way from a distant town. Some of them were very pretty, and all beautifully dressed, and they were laughing and talking, brimful of pleasure. Ellen thought how nice it must be to have all this luxury, ease, and pleasure, and at the same moment folded her bare arms one over the other, and leaned against the trellis-work porch, 'twined with white feathery clematis. She sighed, as they passed out of sight, and said—

"I wish I was a lady and had things like those have—such lovely dresses, houses, and all."

A sudden drowsiness came over her; she pressed her cheek heavily against the clematis-stems which twined in and out of the porch, and then her knees

giving way, she felt herself falling, but recovering her senses with a jerk, she opened her eyes, and—

The cottage was gone—the lane was gone—there was no trace of Betsey Smith's green-painted fence to be seen. A large avenue of stately trees was looking dark and shadowy in the brilliant sunset light. A flight of white marble steps was at her feet, and a large black dog lay asleep close by them. The porch, supported by large white stone pillars, was twined here and there with clematis, and a loose spray hung directly over her head. The great door was such a door, and such an entrance-hall, to Ellen; she was afraid to go in, it seemed like Fairyland. There were white marble statues standing out amongst the dark-green foliage of lovely flowering-trees, whose perfume rolled out to her as she stood looking in, wondering how in the world she had come there, and expecting that some one would appear directly to send her to prison if she did not go away at once. So she trembled and gazed outside and in, but was so frightened that she dared not venture a step either one way or the other. It was getting more and more shadowy, but there certainly seemed to be lights the other side of the mansion. She made up her mind that she would knock and tell the servants she had lost her way, and ask how far it

was to the village of Noake. So, with shaking hand, she reached up to the knocker and gave the very faintest rap, but no one came ; then gaining a little courage, she tried a louder one, but still no answer. At last, very timidly, she slunk in. Everything was magnificent. There were doors on the right and on the left. She peeped with frightened eyes in the first room she came to. It was full of books. There was a dark, soft, velvety carpet upon the floor; a highly-polished writing-table, where a bright silver inkstand stood, representing a miniature palm-tree spreading its feathery branches above the figure of an Arab standing at the side of a kneeling camel, the animal's burden being a round crystal well, made to contain ink, and the Arab's staff forming a penholder. This took Ellen's fancy directly—she had seen a picture something like it in one of her grandma's old books. The richly-carved ornaments, panels, and mantelpiece, the heavy satin curtains, or the valuable collection of books, Ellen scarcely noticed. She passed along the hall to another door. Here was an immense dining-room; its long table set out with fruits, flowers, meats, and all the appetite could desire. A large looking-glass faced this table at either end, multiplying the room so many times that it appeared to be miles long. As Ellen entered,



"As Ellen entered a young lady seemed to be coming towards her."

a young lady seemed to be coming towards her, and another one going away from her out into the immense space, filled by never-ending tables all laden with dainties precisely similar to those upon the table at her side. She stopped, afraid to move another step. The young lady stopped. She made a low curtsy and was about to speak, and the figure facing her and the retreating one did exactly the same. She put her hand to her head; both ladies mimicked the action. And then the thought came over her that it must be *only herself* doubly reflected in the two looking-glasses, so she went towards the one she had been facing all this time, and grew more astonished at herself than at all the lovely things she had seen before. Her old brown linsey dress had changed to one of rich brown silk, and was no longer short and ugly, but reached down to her feet; her hair looked soft and silky, and hung in graceful curls on her shoulders. She glanced down at her feet, expecting to see those old shoes burst out at the sides which she had worn for many a month; but, instead of this, her feet were cased in the loveliest embroidered slippers, fit for a princess to wear, they were so delicate and soft; and as she did so she was amazed to see, standing with his back to the fire, the tiny little man whom she remembered

at once, evidently enjoying her wonder to the utmost. She felt he was an old friend come to help her in her perplexity, so she said—

“I don’t know your name, sir ; but oh, if you please, can you tell me how I came here ? I’m so afraid the people of the house will find me presently and send me to prison for being here and touching their things.”

At this the little man laughed—a mischievous laugh, and full of merriment—which made Ellen forget her fear at once and join in.

“My name,” he said, “is Prince Follow-my-Lead. And have you so soon forgotten what I told you when you were a little milk-girl, dainty lady ? Did you not wish you were rich, and like those ladies which passed by in a carriage when you were standing at your grandmother’s door ? You have the beads still on your wrist. Don’t you remember what I told you when I put them there ?”

“Oh yes,” said Ellen ; “how foolish of me not to think of it before ! Was it my *wishing* that made grandma so kind to me, and cured my poor aching ankle as I got into bed that night ? How funny it all seems ! And now I have come *here*, although I don’t know how. Please, sir, will you tell me what I had better do ? The people who own this house will come in directly and find me,

and then whatever shall I say to them? Oh dear—oh dear!”

At this Follow-my-Lead burst out laughing again so heartily, that Ellen in spite of her trouble could not help joining in. And when he had finished he said—

“I should have something to eat, if I were you, first of all—just to give you a little strength, you know. Afterwards we will go over the place together, and I’ll teach you how to take possession, and step out like a princess.”

Then he strutted backwards and forwards on the large rug which was spread in front of the fireplace with the dignity of a full-grown emperor. Ellen sat down and ate some of the delicious things spread before her on the table, for she felt very hungry, and being only used to the coarsest food, everything there seemed so tempting to her that nearly half an hour passed by before she was ready to start off with her fairy guide.



CHAPTER V.



THEY went down several passages into the kitchen, which was perfection itself, so clean, cool, and bright, with its highly-polished grate, and brilliant silver dish - covers hanging up over the great mantelpiece, and dresser filled with gorgeous-coloured plates, all so

neatly arranged. It had a polished oak floor, on which she nearly slipped down now and then, and rich-coloured mats were laid at the doors and before the fireplace. A marble-topped pastry-table stood under the window, above which was placed a row of lovely flowers in bright-red pots, and among them

a myrtle tree in full bloom. This pleased Ellen more than anything else, because it reminded her of her old home. From here they went into the pantry, which was so well stocked that Ellen turned to her guide and said—

“What will the people think if they come back and find us here looking at their food? Oh, *do* let us go away, please.”

But Follow-my-Lead only turned to her and said—

“Why, what a dull girl you are, Ellen; haven’t you found out yet that it *all belongs* to you? I thought you had made up your mind to that ten minutes ago in the dining-room.”

“All belongs to me! what *do* you mean? I’m sure I don’t understand,” she said, half inclined to cry. “You *must* be making fun of me to tell me such a thing.”

“Then *where* are the owners? If there are any, why don’t they appear, or at least show some signs of their existence?” said the Fairy. “This kitchen alone should have at least two or three servants busy in it, and people should be passing to and fro in the hall; but listen, can you hear a footfall anywhere?” And Ellen held her breath to listen, but not the faintest sound reached her. That great house with all its rooms and corridors was as still as the grave itself.

After this she followed him up the grand staircase,

through the gorgeous drawing-room, with its quaint, carved chairs, whose cushions were made of bronze green plush, embroidered with water-lilies. Creamy lace curtains draped the windows, and a carpet so thick and velvety lay on the floor that Ellen felt quite uncomfortable in walking over it for fear of leaving a footmark behind. It was a beautiful room, very large and exquisitely furnished. At one end it opened into a splend conservatory, where feathery palm-leaves arching overhead, and great bending ferns shaded banks of rarer ones, amongst which brilliant-coloured flowers blossomed in thick profusion—sometimes from beds of dewy moss, at others massed in banks of gorgeous colours. It seemed like Fairyland indeed. A lovely little fountain was playing in the centre, making a soft tinkling dreamy sound, its basin filled with crimson water-lilies and other rare river-plants. By the side of this stood a richly-cushioned couch; here Ellen seated herself to enjoy the perfection of beauty which the soft twilight shadow only made more enjoyable. Follow-my-Lead soon hurried her away with the words—

“We have much to see yet, fair lady; you had better not waste the precious minutes of daylight.”

So opening another door, he led her through it towards the upper rooms. First they entered the blue

room. This was draped with light-blue satin and ivory white lace, the bed-quilt being made of white satin embroidered with forget-me-nots, and heavily fringed with silver. The large looking-glass was framed in china, from whose festoons of forget-me-nots little Cupids peeped out here and there, offering silver torches to the passers-by. Soft white rugs were strewn about, and there were luxurious blue satin-cushioned lounging chairs and ivory tables. After just glancing in here for a few minutes they went on to the next room. This was almost exactly the same in arrangement, only pink satin curtains and bed hangings took the place of blue, and the bed-quilt was fringed with gold and embroidered with rosebuds instead of forget-me-nots. Then having just peeped in here they opened the next door. This room had cream-coloured satin hangings, embroidered with large crimson flowers, something like cactus. It seemed to Ellen larger than the others, and she thought even richer and more beautiful; so turning to Follow-my-Lead, she said—

“I like this room the best of all.”

Then he answered—

“You will have it for *your own*, I suppose.”

But Ellen only burst out with impatience—

“Oh, I am only dreaming; I know—I feel—quite sure this lovely place *cannot* be really mine. Besides, how am I to live here alone?”

Follow-my-Lead smiled.

"How many more times am I to remind you of the beads! By simply *wishing* you can have the whole parish of Noake at your heels in a short time—and yet you say, 'How am I to live here alone?' See, it is getting dark; I should desire to have my mansion lit up if I were you."

"You are making fun of me!" said Ellen. "Who is there to light it, I should like to know?"

"Just shut your eyes—wish—and leave the rest to fate," replied the little man.

So Ellen did as he suggested, and when she opened her eyes again, the hall, staircase, and every room that she could see into, were one blaze of light.

"There, now," said Follow-my-Lead, "what will you wish for next?"

"That grandma and old Mrs. Smith may come, if I am to sleep here to-night. I cannot be left alone."

"But you'll want a housekeeper and three or four servants, I suppose?" said the Fairy. "Why not fetch them up at once?"

"Oh dear, yes," answered Ellen, with something like a sigh—a sort of frightened feeling creeping over her as she thought of her new position. "Don't you think, sir, we could manage with *one* for the present?"

"Well, but if the business is settled at once, you will have no more worry about it. Look here, you'll certainly want a butler, a coachman, and a lodge-keeper to open the park gates."

"Is there a lodge?" Ellen interrupted. "I didn't see one anywhere when I stood on the steps."

"You've not seen everything yet, young lady," said the Fairy, "I can tell you. There is a lodge by the gates; and, moreover, you *must* have some one to live in it—but of course you can wait if you like, only I always think there's no time like the present."

"Well, perhaps not," said Ellen. "Let me think; there's old Thomson, he was always very kind to me, he would do nicely if he'd come. Then there's grandma and Mrs. Smith; she could be housekeeper very well, and her daughter Bessie would do for a servant. Then Bill Stokes might come, because he was Mr. Harrington's footman a little while ago, and he'll know exactly what to do in a big house like this. Oh, how silly I am! I must be dreaming—I know I must be dreaming. Surely it can't be true?" But after she had pinched her arm hard enough to bruise it, she felt more sure of herself.

"You'll go and let them in, presently, won't you?" said Follow-my-Lead. "See, Echo"—that was the big black dog she left lying on a mat in the porch when

she entered the house—"is waiting to escort you. Wrap something round you, and run. Good-bye, he'll lead you now. I have other matters to attend to—farewell." And before Ellen could answer, he was nowhere to be seen.

Sure enough Echo, the big dog, was wagging his tail and looking up into her face as if he was asking her to come with him, so she tripped lightly downstairs after him, and went out timidly into the darkness. After awhile she could see quite plainly, although it looked very dark and gloomy when she first started. The stars began to show bright and crisp in their white brilliance over her head, so she tripped with the dog just in front of her down a side-path, because it was lighter there than in the grove of thick elms which faced the great entrance. But although she had nearly reached the gate, she didn't *really* expect to see her grandma and the others there. However, as soon as she came in sight of it, a noise like many voices all talking together met her ears, then a good deal of shaking and thumping, and a little laughter every now and then, just as if some rude people were trying to get in, but when she had got quite close to the gate with its pretty lodge, she stood still and looked round for a few seconds, trying to collect her thoughts before she spoke.

"Yere be some 'un a-comin' at last," said a voice, very like that of old Thomson. "I be blest but it be a ooman. Y'ere you, missus, let us in, will yer? we wants to see the master on pertickler bus'ness."

Echo growled a low deep reproving growl, which made them all start back from the gate, for none of them had noticed the dog, and two or three of them were so frightened that they ran down the lane a little way towards Noake. Ellen spoke gently to the people.

"If you will wait quietly for a minute or two, I will unlock the gate, and hear what you have to say."

"You must chain up that 'ere dog afore I comes in," said a man's voice.

"He will not hurt you," replied Ellen, although she felt by no means *sure* of this, for as we know she herself had only made his acquaintance about two hours ago, but in her present lonely position she could not afford to frighten these people away.





CHAPTER VI.

ELLEN opened the lodge door rather hastily, and in doing so heard something go clink-clank at the back of it ; so thinking very likely it might be the key she wanted hanging there, she carefully passed her hand over the polished panels until it struck against a nail, and there sure enough dangling from it was a large iron key. She immediately returned to the gate. Of course the good folks of Noake had not recognised her, because she appeared so much taller and older than Grumpy Margery's

patient little grandchild ; but as Ellen felt sure that she should know all these good people so well, it seemed to her almost impossible that they would look upon her as a total stranger ; so when she heard a few whispers of " Who be she ? " Ellen tremblingly waited the answer, which never came.

" Here is the key, Thomson," she forced herself to say—not that she had *seen* the old man, but that she had *wished* he might come, and wanted to test the power of her bracelet. " *You* must unlock the gate, one of you ; it is too hard for me."

" All right, Miss," old Thomson responded in gruff tones ; " thank ye kindly, Miss." And he handed her back the key, Ellen holding Echo by his collar—who, however, made no struggle to get at the people as they came in.

" This old woman," Thomson said, pointing to Grumpy Margery, " has lost her little grand-daughter, Ellen, and came to us in great trouble about it, so we all started off in different directions trying to find her, but somehow we all met together in this lane, and not long ago a strange-looking man met us and telled us that she were comed in y'ere. If so be as you knows anything about her, Miss, or has seen her a-wandering about the grounds anywheres, we should all be heartily grateful for the news." And Thomson took out his

bright-red pocket-handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, so it was a great exertion for him to say so much all at once.

"If you will all follow me," said Ellen graciously, still keeping hold of Echo's collar, "I think I may be able to help you." And presently they saw only a tall slender figure tripping lightly up the narrow path in front of them, never stopping to look behind once, until she reached the top of the high steps, where she paused a few seconds to find out if they were coming or not. As soon, however, as she could distinguish a dark moving mass in the distance, she beckoned with her hand, and then disappeared.

"Now," said she to herself, "what shall I do? They won't believe the place is mine if they recognise me. I don't think they will, for I really seem so different from myself. I must try to behave like a lady would do. First I will sit down in this easy-chair." She had gone into the library. "I heard what Mrs. Miles at the Rectory said when I went with Annie Payne the day she hired her for general servant. I must try to remember everything. First, she had a footstool. Oh, here is one! And then she had a book open upon her lap, as if she had

been reading." And Ellen took one off the table and placed it carefully on her knee, open in the middle. "I think I shall know what to say. They are coming up the steps—I can hear them. They are afraid to come in; but I mustn't get out of this chair. It wouldn't look lady-like to go to the door myself." But after she had allowed them to knock three or four times she got very fidgety, and was obliged to spring up and say, "Come in," and then rush back again to her seat.

They all trooped into the large, stately room like so many cats treading on hot bricks. Her poor old grandma did not, of course, recognise Ellen in the fair young lady who sat so quiet and dignified in her large old-fashioned carved oak chair, yet looked at them all with such timid half-frightened eyes. When old Thomson began asking about little Ellen, begging her to assist them in finding her, she knew for certain that they had not recognised her, and grew much bolder in speaking to them. She invited them to have supper, and led them into the grand dining-hall, seating her grandma in the easy arm-chair by the fireplace, and placing a small ebony table at her side, helped her to a large share of dainties with her own hands, but left the others to arrange themselves how they liked at the large, highly-decorated table. They soon grew

merry and boisterous enough over it—broke two or three wine-glasses, and upset a large dish of grapes on the floor, which they trod over the carpet, as they vainly tried to pick them up again. When each one finished his or her meal, Ellen told them to come in to her—she had something to say to them. So they went into the library in turn, and she arranged for them to take different situations in her household. Some said they would stay at once to oblige her, but others were compelled to return to the village, and these promised to let the friends of those who agreed to stay know where they were. But, somehow, in the general excitement and astonishment, little Ellen seemed quite forgotten.

At last Dame Margery herself rose to leave, with many thanks, but Ellen gently drew her aside from the others, and leading her into a little parlour, a sort of anteroom from the library, which was more plainly furnished than the others, she locked the door carefully, and having seated the old dame in a lounging chair, fell down on her knees before her—wishing with all her heart that her grandma might recognise her, for she felt very sad and lonely in that big house without some one to love and care for her.

Presently a mist seemed to clear away from the old dame's eyes; she threw her arms round Ellen,

hugging and kissing her, and calling her her lost darling. Then Ellen told her the tale of the beads, how she found herself at this great house, and what her wonderful little friend, Follow-my-Lead, had said to her. But the old dame only shook her head—it seemed far too good to be true ; but at the same time she nestled more contentedly in the soft-cushioned chair, and when Ellen had lighted a fire, to make the room more comfortable, she said no more about going home that night.

After this the young lady gave Mrs. Smith her keys, bidding her take charge of everything, and as she had been housekeeper to great folks most of her life, she accepted this post with solemn dignity, and immediately began to overlook the different arrangements of the house, and grumble without cause at the negligence of the supposed servants who had held situations in it before. Thomson was to sleep here this night, and take charge of the Lodge to-morrow. Will had gone back to the village, but Bessie stopped to help her mother and be taught her new duties. After a light supper brought by Bessie into the little room, Ellen led her grandma to one of the beautifully-furnished bedrooms upstairs, but when the old lady had just peeped in, it was quite enough.

“No, no, my dear,” she said to Ellen. “I’ll just go down and sit in the arm-chair by the fire. Those

rooms are for the gentry, not for poor folks like me. I should expect to have the per-lece coming up, and turning me out of the house in my bedgownd, if I got into one of them beds."

"But, grandma," pleaded Ellen, with tears in her eyes, "if it is all mine and I choose to give you a nice room to sleep in, surely no one can possibly turn you out. Besides, if it is not too good for me, how can it be too good for you?"

But the old lady only shook her head, muttering—"No, no, I'd rayther not, my child—I'd rayther not," and hobbled down again to the fireside, where she *would* spend the night, in spite of Ellen's entreaties.

Ellen took possession of the cream-coloured chamber, and a lovely place it was, rich with dainty nicknacks. Its toilet-set alone was a marvel of art. A branch of the cactus-like flower, which ornamented all the satin hangings of the room, seemed to be bound by a thick golden cord to the neck of the water-ewer, thus forming its handle; similar flowers decorated the china frame of the looking-glass and met your eye again in all sorts of unexpected places. A richly-embroidered curtain at one side of the room suddenly attracted Ellen's eyes. She pushed it aside, and discovered a small door slightly ajar; this she threw hastily open, and the prettiest little room she had ever seen

opened full on her sight. It was lighted by two delicate lily-shaped candelabra held in the hands of two graceful marble figures. Ellen did not know much about music, painting, or books, but her eyes told her at once that the harp, piano, guitar—the easel, and richly-bound books which nestled close to one another on little carved cases hanging here and there over a soft velvet lounge, were things which ought to please a young lady. She took them carefully in her hands, and ran her fingers first over this instrument and then over that, studiously looking through the folios of paintings, admiring them each in turn. Then she reached down book after book ; they seemed very lovely, if one might judge by their outside appearance and inside pictures. Ellen was so exceedingly pleased with her little boudoir, that she determined to use it well, and it was not until after midnight that she laid herself beneath the heavily-fringed gorgeous counterpane, and slept the quiet sleep of innocence.





NEXT morning she was awakened by a light touch on her arm, which in her sleep she had thrown above her head, and there stood Bessie, with a small silver tray, a lovely pink cup and saucer—from which arose a very pleasant savour of tea—and a plateful of dainties from the pantry, waiting for her to rouse herself.

“Oh, if you please, Miss,” said Bessie, in a very

gentle voice, " Dame Margery told me before she left to be sure and bring you some breakfast upstairs before you dressed, as she felt sure you would be tired this morning. And Mrs. Smith wants to know whether you expect company, and what she shall order for dinner to-day."

Ellen rubbed her eyes, half doubting the reality of the whole place around her.

"Tell Mrs. Smith I shall be down presently, and then I will see her. You may set the tray on a table, move it up to the bed, and leave me, Bessie," said the young mistress, amazed at everything, but especially at *herself*. Having sipped her tea and eaten the good things they had sent up for her, she began to dress. At the foot of her bed lay a soft cream-coloured plush dressing-gown, trimmed with crimson bows up the front. She had not noticed it the night before; evidently it was put in this position to tempt her to try it on. She did so, and stood many minutes before the full-length looking-glass which formed doors to a huge mother-of-pearl wardrobe, which reached nearly to the ceiling, and was inlaid with half squares of deep crimson, forming a graceful pattern round it.

When Ellen had admired the exact fit of her morning robe to her heart's content she saw a pair of soft crimson slippers lying under the chair which had held the

dressings-gown—these she put on, then threw open her bedroom door, and began to trip gently downstairs. Her grandma had slept all night in the cosy arm-chair in that little parlour where Ellen left her last night. Very early she woke up and found her way into the kitchen, but not before Mrs. Smith, who was mightily busy setting Bessie to work, and telling her the many things she would be expected to do. Dame Margery stumped in and said she would like a cup of tea before she went to the village, so Mrs. Smith hurried breakfast on. Then they both sat down together, and gossiped merrily while they ate and drank. Then Dame Margery started off towards her home. This was about eight o'clock, and Ellen did not wake until eleven, so her old grandma had reached the cottage about the time she stood admiring her new robe before the looking-glass. Bessie was coming up the stairs, broom in hand, as Miss Ellen reached the first landing.

“I want Dame Margery to come up to me,” she said.

“Oh, please, Miss,” said Bessie, “she’s been gone home this two hours. She slept downstairs in the parlour, Miss, and had breakfast with mother.”

“Then tell Mrs. Smith I wish to speak to her,” said the young mistress, her voice slightly trembling, as if she was about to be detected in a fraud.

Soon Mrs. Smith appeared. If she didn't recognize Ellen last night, there was no chance of it now, as she stood there looking so lovely in her elegant morning-dress, which fitted her to perfection; and by letting Mrs. Smith suggest everything to her, she managed to arrange matters very satisfactorily. After this she strolled dreamily through the drawing-room into the conservatory, where she sat herself quietly down to think under the shady palms and ferns—the little fountain tinkling merrily, and dancing up and down in the bright flecks of sunlight which struggled through intersecting leaves against the roof. “How shall I pay all these people?” she said to herself. “I have no money, and I’m sure Mrs. Smith expected me to give her some this morning, and I have not a single half-penny. I don’t like playing at being mistress here without money. I fancy it won’t be at all nice. Oh dear, what shall I do about it? grandma has gone away, so I can’t ask her.” And the first cloud actually settled down upon the fair forehead of our sweet little friend Ellen.

“What’s the matter now?” said a shrill tiny voice close to her ear, and seated on the edge of the fountain’s basin she saw Fairy Prince Follow-my-Lead, looking quite as jolly as ever. “What’s the matter now, young lady? You want money, ay?

Ah! one want always brings another. I suppose you expect *me* to supply it, don't you? Well, now, look here," and he drew out of his pocket a beautiful little frosted silver casket. "If I was not very fond of you I shouldn't give you this. But I am, you see, and so I have brought it up from my Palace in Fairyland on purpose for you. Isn't it pretty, now?"

And Ellen bent her head over it, thinking she had never seen anything half so lovely, even in this beautiful mansion that he had given her.

"It is lovely," said Ellen, holding it carefully in both hands. "What tiny, life-like people are carved upon it! And what are they stooping down for?" she said.

"They are gathering jewels out of the rock plains in Fairyland, pretty much as you earth people glean corn from the meadows. These are sort of half-caste fairies, quite the commonest class in our land. But they are very good in their way, too," said the Prince, drawing himself up with a small dignity which would have been highly amusing to another person, but Ellen thought it was quite the correct thing, and saw nothing to laugh at.

"Very useful indeed," he continued. "Perhaps I will take you among them some day, if you like to come, and show you our army, our King's Palace, and all the wonders of our kingdom."

"Oh, thank you," said Ellen. "I should like that so much. Couldn't I go now? I've nothing particular to amuse me this morning, and I feel very idle sitting here when I ought to be feeding the fowls, or doing dairy-work for grandma. I wonder if any one milked Old Brownie this morning. It seems as if I had been ages away from that little cottage. I don't even think or talk the same, and look how tall I have grown. It isn't quite so nice to be a lady as I thought it would be. Not one of my old friends except grandma knows me, and I hav'n't anything to do to amuse me; but I wouldn't go back to my old life again either," she said, with a shrinking feeling, as if the very mention of it might carry her back there at once.

At this the Fairy laughed. Then the trouble all went out of her heart in a moment, and she was as merry and happy as could be.

"You must take this box," he said, "and put it in a larger one, which you will find in your wardrobe. Be sure you never lose the key, or let any one go to it but yourself, and you will never want money, because just as much as you take out will be put back again, but if any one else takes it out, that will never be put back, and you will become poor. So you must set great store by it. Here is the key,"

and he held towards her a brilliant diamond necklace, to which was suspended a large crystal heart, with E written upon it, in crimson gems ; by pressing this in three different places at once it sprang open, and showed a small silver key, fitted exactly in. This necklace he bade Ellen clasp round her neck, and then retired to the side of the fountain to get a good look at her, putting his head first on one side, and then on the other. He pretended to be dazzled by her sunny face and hair, and he laughed so heartily when Ellen tried to thank him, that she forgot all else, even the casket which she was holding in her hand all the time.

"What are you going to give me in exchange for the things I have given you?" said the Prince, becoming serious all of a sudden.

"I have not a single thing of my own to offer," said Ellen, "or I would give it you with pleasure. Everything in the house and out of it which I call mine is really yours."

"Think again," he said softly, and one of her light-brown curls with the movement of her head strayed over the bosom of her dress.

"Oh yes," she said, "I will give you one of my curls; they *are* really my own, although nothing else seems to be." And she was running to fetch some scissors

to cut it off, when Follow-my-Lead took a small golden pair from his pocket and handed it to her. The next instant she was twirling a bright soft curl round her finger. "*Now—I ought to put it in a locket,*" she said, "*before I give you it.*"

At which he produced another small crystal box, heart-shaped like that he had given her, and held it open for her to put the curl in, which she very soon did, curtsying humbly, and saying—

"It is all I have to give."

"Not quite," said the Prince cheerfully. And then he laughed again, so merrily this time that the roses above their heads seemed to be laughing too, for they let fall such a complete shower of many-coloured leaves that it almost threatened to smother them both. The conservatory floor was literally carpeted with them, and still they flickered down, brilliant in the specks of sunlight which broke here and there through the shadow of palm and grape boughs arching at the roof. Ellen vigorously shook them off her dress and hair, then turned to speak to her merry friend, but he was nowhere to be seen—not a trace of him remained.



CHAPTER VIII.



ALLEN hugged the silver casket close to her bosom, and ran lightly upstairs to her own bedroom. Then, after having carefully placed it as he had told her in another box, she locked the wardrobe door and put the key in her pocket. After this she wandered into the little room where she had sat so late the night before, and began to wonder if she should ever learn to make sweet music come out of those curious things like some people did.

But soon Mrs. Smith appeared to tell her that Bill Sykes and several more young people wanting situations were waiting in the hall to see her, so she went slowly down the great staircase. She asked

the housekeeper to help her to choose those whom she thought most likely to suit. This was very soon done, and all things looked promising for our young householder.

"I would go out if I had a carriage," Ellen thought to herself. "Will wishing get it for me, I wonder? At any rate it is worth while to try."

So shutting her eyes she touched the beads on her wrist, and wished for a *nice carriage with two cream-coloured horses*, but unfortunately forgot to add a coachman to drive them.

Almost before she had opened her eyes again, she heard a sound of wheels upon the gravel road, followed by a sharp clattering of hoofs, coming nearer and nearer, and at last stopping at the door. After this followed a shouting and screaming, as if some accident had happened, and almost at the same instant old Thomson rushed in, his white hair flying about his face in wild disorder, while a thin stream of blood ran from his cheek right down to his feet. He was gasping for breath, and struggling to speak, but could not articulate a single word.

Mrs. Smith forced him into the nearest chair, and then began at once to apply remedies to his wound. Bill Sykes ran out to the horses. One of them had a slight graze on his shoulder, and both were violently

trembling, as though they had been very much frightened.

Presently little Emily, Thomson's grandchild, arrived, and from her Ellen soon heard what had happened. Old Thomson, seeing a carriage coming up to the Lodge, hurried out to open the gates. He was pushing the first one back, when looking up at the carriage he just noticed that there was no coachman on the box. This made him hesitate an instant; he tried to shut the gate again, but the horses still came on, swinging it back against him with great force, and breaking away the lower part of the one which was closed. One of the back wheels caught in the iron work, as the horses strained, so as to jerk it over. The old man jumped on to the step of the carriage, and holding to the side of it with both his hands, arrived very soon at the big house. "But," said little Emily, as she finished her tale, "if the gate had not given way, Miss, I think the carriage would have broken all to pieces, the horses were so determined to pull it through, whatever came in their way."

"I am very glad it is no worse," Ellen answered, "and I hope your poor grandfather will soon be better."

"Have no fear of that, Miss," broke in Goody

Smith, who had just bound up his wound to her entire satisfaction, "I've never known *my ointment* to fail yet, and I've used it nigh on forty years now, and my poor mother afore me as many more; he's a thousand times better a'ready."

So Ellen ran down the steps, and petted those lovely horses, which looked at her and responded to her caresses as if they had been old and dear friends.

After a little while she noticed that Bill Sykes was standing at a respectful distance evidently expecting orders, so she said—

"The coachman must have met with an accident upon the road. I would like to make inquiries as soon as possible. Can you drive?"

"Lor, yes, Miss," replied Bill, with an awkward bow, "ever since I was a kid *that* high."

"I may possibly feel inclined to give you his situation some day if I find you competent," Ellen found herself saying, just as if some other person were speaking through her, because the words were not really her own at all, she only dimly understood them even, and yet felt obliged, by some indescribable force outside herself, to say just what was dictated.

"I shall be ready in a few minutes," she said to Bill, and ran up the steps again. He at once went into the kitchen, and from some odd corner or other

hunted up an old livery coat and hat, with which he arrayed himself, and returned to his charge. Ellen soon made her appearance; she had found in her wardrobe a ruby-coloured cashmere dress, with mantle to match, and just like the dress one of those young ladies wore whom she saw in the carriage yesterday, when looking out of her grandma's porch. There was a hat trimmed to match with a long white feather falling gracefully on one side; this she placed upon her head, and began to draw on those gloves that lay beside it in the same box. Soon she was ready and waiting on the steps, while Bessie and Emily arranged the rugs and cushions in the carriage for her, and soon she was speeding merrily away towards the little village of Noake, for she had told Bill Sykes to drive to Dame Margery's. He kept wondering that they never came across the missing coachman on their way. Everything looked so familiar to Ellen as she went along. It was like coming home again after years of absence; for as these few hours which we have recorded had really added years to Ellen's age, so she seemed to have lived them *away from here*. She leaned forward in the carriage with a sweet smile of remembrance on her face, passed cottages, shops, and people whom she had known all her life, but there was a strange difference now,

for everybody stared at her—some of them curtsied ; but although she knew them so well herself, not one recognised her as Dame Margery's little girl. Farmer Bean's pony was trotting along the road—she saw it a long way off. Nearer and nearer rolled the grand carriage with its one occupant ; the jolly Farmer turned to gaze as she passed by, but there was no cordial, "Hullo, little 'un, where be ye orf to now, ay?" She had almost expected it as the natural greeting from him ; but now the old man respectfully lifted his grey felt hat from his shiny bald head, and, almost before a look of wonder darted over his ruddy face, Ellen had gone by. The tear-drops began to gather in her eyes, and a cold feeling of loneliness made her young heart ache in spite of all her grandeur. "I wouldn't have minded so much," she murmured to herself with a half sob, "if Farmer Beans had only said 'Good-morning, Miss.' But I seem to have lost all my friends at once ; I hope grandma will be pleased to see me."

Very soon they arrived at Dame Margery's little cottage. Here Ellen got out and softly knocked at the door, then as softly opened it and peeped in. How mean and poor everything looked, but how familiar too. There were those old torn books, the myrtle-tree in blossom, and above all, Dame Margery herself, sound

asleep in her easy-chair ; for, tired with her long walk and want of proper rest in the little parlour of the Great House, she had thrown herself down before removing her bonnet and shawl, and was soon in the land of dreams, her head hanging uneasily on one side, and her snores loud and frequent.

Ellen sat down on one of the little hard wooden chairs to wait until the Dame had had her nap. Her own little torn lesson-book lay on the table by her side ; she turned over its leaves dreamily ; this, too, had altered, for only a few days ago it seemed to contain so much learning that she almost despaired when she tried to spell the long words, but now they had become quite easy to her—she could read them all at a glance. Her little blue cloak hung on its proper peg behind the door. How many Sundays she had gone to church in it ! She took it down and threw it over her shoulder, laughing softly to find how small it had suddenly become for her ; it didn't reach nearly to her knees now, and as for buttoning it at the neck, that was impossible—it wouldn't come to by several inches. " No wonder the people don't know me," she said. " The truth is, I'm not Ellen at all, but somebody else. I can't see how I can be Ellen. Why, it would give me a pain in my side to see those milk-pails which I used to carry down the lane, let alone lift them. I

do believe I *could not* do it now ;” and she ran out into the back yard to try, but split her new kid glove right across the palm with her effort to grasp the handle. “Oh dear,” she said, “how stupid I am ! I’ll never try to be the poor little milkmaid, Ellen, again—I shall spoil my nice new clothes if I do ;” and she looked ruefully at her torn glove. She had felt very proud of them at starting, because they fitted her so beautifully.

The old lady was still asleep and snoring when Ellen came in. Bill had driven up the lane with the carriage, because the horses didn’t like to stand still. She began to get fidgety in this comfortless cottage. All things here reminded her too much of the past to be altogether pleasant. She felt a sort of fear creeping over her that she might at any moment be transformed back into the little patient drudge of past days. It needed all the reality of her smart clothes and the grand carriage outside, to convince her that she had not been merely dreaming of better things. By chance she caught sight of her face reflected in the old broken-framed looking-glass near the window, where every morning in the past six years she had stood to smooth her hair before venturing into the village ; and, remembering *how* that little face used to look there, she was more astonished than ever at its

present reflection. Instead of a golden-haired, rosy-cheeked, laughing child with sun-burned complexion, she saw a refined, softly-moulded face, with large, deep-blue inquiring eyes, rosy pouting lips—much like the child's, but firmer at the corners and meeting in dimples—soft golden-tinted brown hair nestling in careless rings over forehead and neck, while some even strayed upon the graceful curve of her shoulder—all this surmounted by a large hat trimmed with ruby velvet, a long white feather drooping over the rim, and the old broken bit of glass gave back to those two wondering eyes as lovely a picture as ever Sir Joshua Reynolds painted. Dainty Ellen, the little fairy had called her, and she thought it was a wonderfully correct name for the fair reflection her face gave back.

Presently, while she was engaged in admiring herself, the snores ceased, and Grumpy Margery began to recover consciousness. She started up in amazement on seeing Ellen, but didn't recognise her a bit, for she very politely asked what she was pleased to want of her. Ellen caught her old sinewy hands in her own, and cried out, "Grandma, grandma, don't you know me this morning? I am your own Ellen—your own little grandchild, and you must come up to the Great House and live with me, and help me to manage everything."

The old lady shook her head, and looking searchingly in the pretty young face before her, said—"You may *think* you are Ellen, my dear, but it's all magic. I'm afeared my little gal has been sperited away somewheres, and I sha'n't see her never no more ;" and the Dame put her handkerchief to her eyes. "They all says she's lost. Betsey Smith, as met me when I were coming home, telled me how as her Bill met another chap in the village as said some other feller telled him that he seed over yonder at Woolton a little gal sitting crying close by the water ; her feet was that sore and bleeding, she was a-bathing them to try and make 'em better ; and says I to myself, ' That's my poor Ellen,' and when the carrer's cart goes up to Woolton this blessed afternoon I goes with it and brings her back—poor little thing !—sure enough."

Ellen held down her head and sighed. "I am very sorry you do not know me, grandma." Then a lucky thought came into her head. "I will drive you over to Woolton now directly. You need not wait for the cart ; and we will look for the little girl together and bring her back with us, perhaps, if she is like Ellen."

So the old woman hobbled away to get her bonnet and shawl, and having locked her cottage door, they were soon speeding along the road to Woolton.

CHAPTER IX.



ELLEN left Dame Margery to make all inquiries about the child while she did some shopping in the town. Bill was measured for a complete suit of livery. A blacksmith was ordered to repair the Lodge gates, and several small purchases were made both for herself and her grandma, before

they met to start home. Of course the little girl which Dame Margery supposed to be Ellen was as unlike her as any one possibly could be. The innkeeper told them that they had found her lying beside a hay-rick that morning, dirty, half clothed, and almost

dying of hunger. Ellen's heart moved with pity for her helpless condition.

"Where do you come from?" "I don't know."
"Where are you going?" "I don't know." "What is your name?" "I don't know." "Oh, that is nonsense!" Ellen said at last. "You are quite old enough to know your own name. Now tell me, what did your mother and father call you?" "I don't know," she replied again. "Cannot some of *you* make her answer differently? Perhaps she is afraid of me; are you, little one?" "I don't know—I don't know."

"The child is an idiot, I'm afraid, Miss," said the innkeeper, respectfully.

"Have you a doctor about here who could tell you for certain?" suggested Ellen. "At any rate, she must be taken care of for the present." Pulling out her purse, she laid two bright sovereigns in the man's hand. "Get her clean clothes, and give her food until the doctor decides what is best to be done for her. I shall expect to hear good news when I come to Woolton again. Good-morning!" And the carriage with its precious burden rolled out of the inn yard.

It was hard work to persuade Dame Margery to quit her little cottage and take up her abode at Aer Hall, as Ellen's mansion was called, and only on the

promise not to let any one else live in the little place, but to keep it neat and clean and ready for her to return any time she liked, and also to take special care of Brownie, the old Dame at last consented, carrying her table in the carriage with her, never leaving hold of it until it was put at the window of her own special room. After this she seemed tolerably happy. By very *slow* degrees she got more used to company, and one evening after allowing herself to be persuaded to join in a game of whist with some old ladies and gentlemen, suddenly became so fond of it that she would have played all day and night, if she could have found any one who would play with her.

Of course, there were many conjectures amongst the ladies and gentlemen who visited them as to who Ellen really was. They all knew the Dame very well; but wondered that this young lady, evidently so well educated and wealthy, should make a poor old village gossip her guardian and companion. Ellen avoided all explanations; so, although there were many guesses, none ever came near the truth. Young people flocked to the Hall. Ellen soon found friends and companions—she had very few lonely hours now—and was literally as happy *as the days were long*, and it was early autumn yet.

People were staying in the house, and amongst them an old Polish gentleman, named Count Ludovic. If Dame Margery was fond of card-playing, he was much fonder—and some folks forget prudence in play. Evening after evening four old people—among whom was Dame Margery—gathered round the whist-table, for she said she couldn't sleep at night unless she had her usual game at cards. And after a run of good-luck, in which she won several pounds, she began to lose—lose—lose—until all the little hoard of money which we saw her count so carefully in her old cottage was *gone*; and worse than this, she still went on playing and losing, although she had nothing to pay with. Hoping to win some day, she borrowed of the others, chiefly Count Ludovic. At last he told her one evening that he had received an urgent letter summoning him to London on business the next morning, and if she could conveniently let him have the money she owed him, he would take it as a favour. That night they sat extra long at the whist-table, and when they got up to retire to their rooms, the poor old Dame found that she owed the Count £20. So, instead of going to bed, she stole quietly to Ellen's room, hoping that young lady would be awake. But, as it happened, she had gone to bed early, because she

disliked cards, and had no young friend staying with her just then. Her grandma stood and looked at her sleeping face, thinking whether she should wake her or not—half inclined to do so, because she had promised the money to the Count the first thing next morning—and he was going before lunch time—but she was wholly ashamed to be obliged to beg money of Ellen for such a purpose. She looked at her lying asleep there by the light of the lamp she held in her hand ; she held it close to her face, and caught the glitter of that diamond necklace which Ellen never had off her neck for many minutes either day or night for fear of losing it. The Dame knew well enough what that locket contained ; she had seen her open it, and take the key out, once or twice, when wanting money from her casket. “Why cannot I get all I need without disturbing her ?” thought the Dame. “I can tell her about it to-morrow morning.” So, leaning softly down, she pressed the locket, as she had seen Ellen do, and it flew open, showing the little silver key. Then she hobbled very softly towards the wardrobe, whose key was left in the lock—found the box with the bright silver casket in it, and from this took out £40, all in gold, which she carefully stowed away into her pocket, locked the casket, replaced it in the box,

closed the wardrobe, and put the key back in the locket, and quietly closing the door after her, went to her own room without arousing Ellen.

Next morning, when the Dame awoke and began thinking over the events of last night, she felt how difficult it would be to tell Ellen what she had done. There were many chances that the money would not be missed at all, because Ellen so often took much larger sums from there, and yet it never seemed emptier. She determined to pay the Count as soon as possible, and then forget all about it. But—alas for her !—fairy money could not be used in the ordinary way ; and when she put her hand into her pocket to take some of those gold coins out, she found that they were so terribly hot that she drew it out again, thrust her fingers into her mouth, and with difficulty kept herself from groaning with pain. They were blistered from end to end, and a great hole burnt in her new silk gown, so that one could see right through just where the coins had lain, and it seemed to be burning still—quietly, without flame or smoke, but shrivelling up everything that came in contact with the money. Presently there was a loud rattling noise on the carpet, and away rolled the sovereigns, some under chairs, some over the sofa, and a good many underneath the table. They seemed innocent-

looking sovereigns enough, and everybody thought that the old woman had a hole in her pocket and didn't know it—or had put some matches there and forgotten them. The Count, and every one in the room, went down on their knees—scrambling like a lot of children after sweetmeats; but no one held them more than an instant before they gladly dropped them again, and writhed with pain, as they showed their blistered fingers to each other, or bound them up in their pocket-handkerchiefs, for every piece was *red hot*. Coats, dresses, shoes, or whatever they were dropped upon, had holes burned in them directly, but the carpet and furniture of the room (much to the folks' astonishment) received no damage whatever.

While everybody was busily talking about this, a servant came in, bringing refreshment on a tray. She saw a bright sovereign lying at her feet, and of course her first impulse was to pick it up. She dipped quickly down, grasped it tightly in her fingers, and then—such a yell! you could hear her all over the house; down went the tray with all the things upon it—away she fled back to the kitchen, mad at being found out, and still shrieking with pain.

Ellen, who happened to be in her boudoir, heard the dreadful scream, and hurried downstairs to see

what was the matter. Just outside the breakfast-room door her grandma met her, and beckoning her aside, whispered in her ear what she had done, and the dreadful consequences. Ellen looked grave a second—then, turning to the Count, said in a voice loud enough for all there to hear her, “Dame Margery wouldn’t believe but that these were real sovereigns—they certainly are a good imitation—and she resolved to try them in spite of all opposition. I am very sorry they have burned your fingers, but the truth is, they were given to me by a magician, and even I myself didn’t know until now the exact extent of their power, or I should have been more careful of them. Luckily, my housekeeper has an ointment which is warranted to cure all sorts of blisters and wounds,”—and she rang the bell for Mrs. Smith, who lost no time in binding up the burned fingers.

“Tell Susan to bring some water here,” said Ellen to a little page-boy who answered the bell ; and presently the new maid appeared, carrying a large jug of clear spring water. “Now pour it over those coins,” she continued. “You had better change your dress, Dame ; that you have on is totally spoilt.” And really it looked a deplorable sight, hanging in rags all down the pocket-side.

The old lady looked ruefully at it, and disappeared

without a word. Susan's honesty, too, was tried by the sight of those glistening coins after she had poured the water on them, for there was such a fascination about them, that people could hardly keep their eyes away from them, and even those who had been burned *once* could hardly resist the temptation of touching them again. So Susan tried to pick up one unseen like Mary had, but this time the effect was quite different—it froze to her two fingers in an instant ; all efforts to pull or shake it off were vain ; the girl cried bitterly, and begged for help ; at last some one thought of soaking her hand in hot water, and after a little while this proved successful ; but no one wanted to go near the sovereigns any more, for fear they might touch them.

Ellen thought the sooner this misfortune went out of her guests' minds the better. She proposed an early luncheon and a drive to Woolton Monastery, an old ruin nearly two miles from the town. Every one seemed pleased with the idea ; so Ellen led the way into the dining-hall, leaning on Count Ludovic's arm, and soon they were all laughing and chatting together as if nothing unusual had happened.

CHAPTER X.



S soon as Ellen
 could get away
 from her guests,
 she stole into
 the breakfast-
 room and
 picked up those
 tell-tale coins.
 They were only
 mere pieces of

harmless metal in her hands, neither freezing nor burn-
 ing any more ; so she put them in her pocket, and
 afterwards replaced them in the casket, while she re-
 minded Dame Margery, who at that particular moment
 stood watching her, that it is always best not to inter-
 fere with other people's things without their leave.
 And the old lady, carrying her burnt hand carefully

bound up in a silk pocket-handkerchief, promised Ellen that nothing in the world should ever induce her to touch those evil things again.

In the garden of Aer Hall there was one very favourite retreat of Ellen's, a little shady bower formed by the drooping boughs of a willow-tree. These bent down to the soft green grass, which formed a high bank around them. Here Ellen was completely shut out of sight, so she had two or three garden chairs and a table placed there. Baskets of flowers were suspended from the highest boughs; here she had her aquarium full of tiny fish and water-snails, her little white squirrels hung just beside them, and then there was a hammock swung a few feet above the ground, where on hot days she would lie and read or think at leisure. Follow-my-Lead sometimes came to visit her in her shady bower, and that perhaps was another reason why she liked it so much, and chose to spend so many hours there alone. One day she had fallen asleep in her hammock, weary of waiting for her fairy friend to appear; he had not been to see her for a long time, and she began to fear that he must have quite forgotten her. So after wishing—with her hand on the beads, which she always kept bound round her wrist—that he might come, she suddenly grew drowsy and fell asleep.

Softly a sort of golden mist gathered over the little bower, lighting up squirrels and flowers with a strange unearthly glare. Then a faint sound of coming music and a rustling as of tiny leaves, and then a light ærial brilliant form suddenly perched on the edge of the hammock and looked down at Ellen's sleeping face, noting every feature with a proud contemptuous smile. "So this is the beauty," she sharply said, "that our young Prince prefers to mine. I will teach him better manners for the future ;" and stooping down, she streaked Ellen's brow across three or four times with her finger, and left deep wrinkles behind them. She breathed on her curls, and they became white like those of an old woman ; and then she drew a corner of her bright veil across Ellen's rounded cheeks, and they immediately lost all their youth, and became thin and hollow-looking. A very different being poor Ellen appeared now—her own sweet youthful self was totally destroyed.

"Ah, ah," laughed the fairy, "I have spoilt your earth-born beauty now, my proud young mistress. All Fairyland would laugh at this aged bride, if our Prince should take you there ; besides, none but the young and lovely *can pass* the double-barred elfin gate which parts this cold miserable world from ours." And gathering up her cloud-like robes with

a sort of disdainful shiver, she fled away on a sun-beam.

Hardly had this cruel fairy passed through the willow boughs out into the free air, than another fairy appeared, golden crowned, and borne on a soft azure fold of light. Many others came with her, sliding down the long ray she left behind her. She too stood gazing at poor Ellen, grown so old in a few seconds, but still asleep, although seeing all these things that happened to her in a dream. "Ah, we see! our wilful attendant Spitfire has been here before us. This is taking our sceptre with a vengeance," said the offended Queen, for she was no other than the bright-eyed Empress of Fairyland herself, Queen Mab. "This is a liberty we cannot allow; we had given no orders under our royal seal that the maiden's beauty should be thus wantonly destroyed. The effects of this deed must not be permitted to remain, or we forfeit our personal sovereignty and aid the jealous vengeance of the hireling Spitfire." So saying she laid her dazzling sceptre softly upon Ellen's face, and it immediately resumed all its sweetness and youth. The poor faded hair unfolded a more brilliant gold, the hollow cheek grew rosier and rounder than ever, the wrinkled forehead became soft and smooth as down, with an added beauty which no words can

describe. Still she slept on, and the Fairy Queen hovered an instant as if about to issue some mandate to one of the bright crowd of courtier fairies around. They seemed to understand her gesture, for they immediately divided into two rows, leaving a clear pathway for one tiny frail-looking sprite bearing a small flower shaped like a vase in her hand to approach the Queen, who then poured some liquid from it upon the sleeper's eyes, and after making a circle round Ellen sped away through the slightly-parted boughs of the willow, her attendants following upwards in the long line of azure which like a train curved and dropped all along whatever course she chose to take.

Almost before the last ray of blue had died out, Ellen woke up trembling, put her hand to her head, and lifting one of her curls, looked closely at it, to see if it had changed colour. She was greatly relieved to find that it had not turned white ; and then began to think what curious things dreams are. Presently she heard a sound very like a sigh close to her ear. She looked carefully round and thought she must have been mistaken. "O how I wish Follow-my-Lead would come, and tell me what it all means ! He has quite forgotten his poor little Ellen now." Again she heard the sigh, but saw nothing. This time she was quite sure that she could not be mistaken—it must.

really be Follow-my-Lead. "You are hiding," she said ; "I know you are."

And then came a tiny whisper, so faint that it was only like the wind rustling through the willow boughs. "Alas !" it said, "your eyes are closed to me. Our Queen has thrown the spell of blindness over you which naturally belongs to your race. They have no power to discern us creatures of another sphere, however near to them we may be. I raised this veil from your eyes for a little while, but now it has fallen again, and I fear can never be lifted any more. I, too, am forbidden to visit you ; it is only by stealth even now that I have answered your summons, being in danger of severe punishment if I am found near you. It is a matter of wonder to me that I can see you at all. And why it is I know not except that the gracious Queen, in pity, has touched you with her sceptre. Ah ! I see," he said, as the possibility of this occurred to him, "its light is on your hair and across your cheek, and adds a new lustre to your almost perfect beauty. I have laid my hand on yours. Can you feel it ? Or has our Queen locked up the sense of touch with that of sight ?"

"Oh, yes," cried Ellen, with a sob, "I feel your hand ; but oh, how strange it is I cannot see you ! and yet you can see me, hear me, feel me even, and I

am put away from you. Are the fairies angry with me because you have favoured me so much? Let me give you all back again, so that they may not punish you. Are you in pain that you sigh instead of laugh, and only whisper when you would speak? Alas that I, poor unlucky I, should cause you such trouble when you have been so kind to me!" and putting her one disengaged and to her eyes she sobbed aloud.

"Don't cry, sweet child," whispered Follow-my-Lead. "I will tell you how it all happened if you will not grieve so," and Ellen dried her eyes directly, for she very much wanted to know the cause of this misfortune.

"You remember the money casket I gave you," he said, still in the softest of whispers. "Well, before I knew you, little Ellen, a fairy named Spitfire was betrothed to me. I had this casket made by some of our most clever working fairies for a present to her, but while it was being finished I found out several things I did not like about her, and was often glad to escape to earth just to get out of the continual worry and hurry with which she kept the whole atmosphere near her astir. Her maidens, I found, were obliged to fly at her bidding like flashes of lightning, and I was expected to do the most outrageous things, only if possible a trifle quicker than they. Now, by a quiet

easy-going fairy like me this was not to be borne, at least for any length of time, so I determined to apply to the King and Queen for a release from my engagement to marry her. She flew in a terrific rage. Nothing could stand beside her, and if 'fairies were able to die, her people would have perished long ago, she is so unspeakably violent. Of course his Majesty the King thought she had been badly used, for she is gentleness itself whenever he condescends to speak to her; but our Queen took my part, and thought it no wonder that I could not put up with her, and all would have gone well, but for a wicked slave of mine whom she had bribed against me with large promises of reward. He came in and told their majesties of my fair earth-love, as he called you, little Ellen—accused me of giving you fairy slaves in the shape of those beads which you wear on your arm, and above all, the money casket designed for Spitfire. This turned their royal favour from me at once. They banished me to work out a dreary exile amongst the lower earth-fairies, who live deep down in dark dreary mines and toil out a wearisome existence. At first I was chained, and watched with great vigilance, because I would not give my solemn promise to keep away from the earth sphere. However, one of my keepers, who had received favours from me when I was free,

promised to help me, and he has done so now by substituting another of my friends in my place until I return. So you see, lady fair, I have not many



seconds to lose ; when the sunshine touches yonder green leaf I must vanish. But one thing I nearly forgot to tell you. Spitfire has vowed she will steal

your beads and casket, so take great care of them. I have no time to say more."

"Must you go so soon?" said Ellen. "Can nothing be done to make the King and Queen less angry? What a dreadfully jealous fairy Spitfire must be? No wonder you dislike her so much. I should *hate* her, I'm sure. When will you come back again? I shall be so anxious to *see* you—no, I mean to *hear* you. I'd give back all I possess most willingly to buy your liberty again. Must you really go? Farewell!" And the cold sensation, which had lain like a frozen rose-leaf upon her hand, lifted, and she knew her fairy friend had gone back to his wearisome exile in the dark gloomy mines.



CHAPTER XI.



ALL night long Ellen lay awake wondering what she could do to release her kind friend.

"Shall I wish myself into Fairyland?" she thought. "Yet what good would that do, since I could not *see* him when I got there; and no doubt the spiteful fairies would only

bind me and put me into some terrible prison, where I should gradually die of misery and starvation."

When it was nearly morning poor Ellen fell asleep and dreamed. First she thought she was a bird beating about over the green fields, trying to find a place for her silver casket, which hung suspended by a ring from her beak, and seemed to drag her to the ground whenever she attempted to mount up above the

clouds, and yet would not let her fly down to rest on the earth. A curious rhyme seemed to beat in her head. "Where shall I hide it? Where shall I hide it?" Then as she sang, rocks, trees, birds, and animals took up the chorus until there was nothing else heard in the clear dome above her, than "Where shall I hide it?" At last a huge white swan, gliding slowly along a silver streak of water from the far north, stretched out its broad wings and flapped them, and began screaming back in a loud shrill unmusical voice, "Here you shall hide it! Here you shall hide it." And then Ellen seemed to drop with extended wings down towards the water, and heavier and heavier grew the casket, resisting all struggles to hold it in mid-air. At last she became exhausted and yielded herself to its guidance as it took her through the basin of the crystal stream, its water making a thousand thunders in her ears—down, down, down—till numbness seized her senses, and she began to grow stiff, cold, powerless, and the casket seemed to fall upon her and nail her to the earth. Then there was a buzz of voices, high and shrill at first, but gradually subsiding into the softest harmony; gentle zephyrs began to fan her cheek; she had no wish to move out of that exquisite sense of rest which gently stole through every limb and sealed her heavy eyelids. It was a dainty perfume, faint, yet full of

fragrance, which brought a blissful forgetfulness and perfect content by simply breathing it. Ellen seemed to lie there for a very long time—weeks, or months perhaps; then she suddenly became aware of voices and feet approaching, a tingling sensation came in her hands and feet, she opened her eyes, expecting to see the casket lying on her chest, but instead of this her own cream-coloured satin quilt lay softly over her, and the bright sunlight was streaming in through a tiny crack in the blind, and it was all a dream—only a dream. She jumped out of bed and hurried to the wardrobe. There stood the box with her silver casket in it. So she lovingly took it out and sat with it on her knee looking at the pictured fairies on its lid, and thinking of her dear little friend who was suffering so much until her tears dropped on it thick and fast. “Dear little fellow!” she said, “if I only knew how to restore him again to his palace I would spare no pains. What a cruel fairy Spitfire must be! And what a horrid name to have! She must have been *bad* from the first for them to have named her so. I suppose fairies are never christened like human beings. I wonder if they are named directly they are born or how! And Fairyland must be a funny place, too. How I should like to go there, especially if I had Prince Follow-my-Lead to guide me and

show me the wonders of it." And Ellen dropped her head on the casket and kissed it many times. Her maid knocked at the door. "Come in," said Ellen, putting it quickly back in its place ; and she did not touch it again all that day, but her thoughts were continually resting upon it.

The next night she dreamed the same dream again ; only the pricking sensation at the end of it lasted longer, and then a bright glare seemed to flash across her eyes, suddenly waking her. It wanted many hours to daybreak, but she could not go to sleep again. "I hate it all," she said to herself, "and would be *glad* to go back again to the work and freedom of Dame Margery's cottage, where every one loved me for myself ; but here no one really loves me—they only make much of me because I have a nice home, and plenty of good things to give them. All this grandeur lies cruel and cold round my heart ; I feel as if chained to a post, and however I struggle, I cannot get away ; but chafing and fretting only make things worse and help me not at all. Ah, I was much happier as a poor little girl, milking old Brownie, and staggering down the lane under the weight of those milk-pails, breathing the free, fresh air of early morning in our little village, where every one had a kind word for me. Now I am in this great, gloomy, silent house,

with nothing to do but follow my own inclination—go where I will, come back when I will—no one really cares what becomes of me. A full-grown young lady, with beautiful dresses to wear, beautiful carriages to drive about in, all one can desire in the world, the envy of most who visit us, the wonder of all. Yet it is not half so pleasant as I thought it would be, when I was the wondering little village maiden, only eleven years old, who stood watching from her grandma's door while that unlucky carriage filled with real young ladies drove past. But I dare not wish myself back again, because I am so much older now, and even fairies cannot turn time back, so I must bear with my folly for dear grandma's sake, and the poor Prince who has been so kind to me."

Some days after this Ellen went down to her willow-bower again, mounted her silken hammock, and swung in idle weariness. Again there came a whisper in her ear, a cold touch rested on her forehead—very softly and gently, as if the petal of a flower had suddenly fallen there. Ellen started—she was full of energy in an instant. "Is it you, my Prince of Good Fairies?" she said. "I have been very unhappy thinking about you in your dreary prison. Have the King and Queen forgiven you yet? They

are very cruel in Fairyland ; I would not like to live there at all."

"Hush," said the soft little voice in her ear, "I have only a short time to spare. Spitfire has vowed to have both your beads and casket, whatever it costs her. She is already under the displeasure of our Queen, and should not be able, unless by bribery, to escape from Fairyland ; but she *may* do so any time by borrowing false colours. So I have come to warn you, lady fair. She will certainly try to get them from you. You must hide them somewhere. In the acacia-tree, next to this, there is a nest. Put your beads in that. She will not venture to touch them ; the birds which guard it are her bitterest enemies, and strong in favour with our royal court. They are also spies of mine, and will return them to you when the danger is over. The casket you must bury in the bank of a little pond four fields from the left side of your mansion. Carry it there yourself. You will find a smooth hollow, shaped like a basin, with one yellow water-flag in full bloom towering above it, and the long grass waving around. Immediately you place it there, a white swan will appear and spread her wings over it, and when it is out of danger return it to you. Farewell!" Then the cold touch on her forehead gave way to

a warmer sensation, and she knew the fairy had gone.

In less than a minute she had torn the beads off her wrist and deposited them in the nest, as he had said, and then ran quickly home for the casket. This, too, she placed under the swan's protection in her nest by the pond, and afterwards felt much happier and lighter of heart than she had for many a long day. Week succeeded week, but she heard no more of the fairies; tradesmen's bills began to pour in, in quick succession, for her household was a very expensive one, and she had forgotten to take any money from the casket before she parted with it. Her beads also, which would have brought her everything she wanted, had gone. In vain every day she went to search for them in the acacia-tree. The nest was totally empty and deserted. Then the soft hollow where she had thoughtlessly laid her lovely little casket, had totally disappeared; she couldn't even find the root of the yellow flag, and frost began to spread over the ground—there were very few wild flowers to be seen anywhere.

Ellen at last went to Dame Margery for counsel. "What shall I do, grandma?" she said. "I have no means now to keep up this large mansion, to pay and feed servants, as I had when the casket and beads were mine. We shall be obliged to go

back to the old cottage again, and live as poor folks do."

At this her grandma began to reproach her bitterly for taking her away from the cottage and letting her have a taste of luxury, only to lose it again directly. "I shall never like to be simple Dame Margery again," said the old lady, tossing her head very high, "with no one but you to wait upon me, and all sorts of drudgery to do for other folks. Oh! why did I come here at all?" she cried, and threw herself on a velvet lounge and fairly sobbed with indignation and wounded pride. "What will all my friends say!—to see me wearing my poor old russet gowns again and hobbling on crutches, instead of riding wherever I liked in a carriage, with a footman to wait upon me. Oh dear, this is a come-down indeed!" and she wept spitefully at the dreary picture.

Poor Ellen's heart ached too; it didn't seem half so nice now to be poor again as she thought it would be when she had everything at her command. Still she did not complain in her grandma's hearing, but gave the servants notice to leave, saying that she intended to give up housekeeping for a while and go abroad. Like her grandma, she felt they could not possibly return to their old cottage again, but that it would be far better to make their home in another

place where no one knew them. The lovely furniture was accordingly advertised for sale ; but the house and land Ellen hoped to be able to let for such a sum of money a year as would keep her and her grandma in comfort.

So big boards were put up at the Lodge gates and other parts of the grounds, telling people that "*This House was to be Let.*" Many came to look over it, some few with the thought of renting it, but many more from curiosity, both as to the house itself and why Ellen was going away. She always made the same excuse—her health required change of air and scene. They were going abroad. And so pale and thin did she look with the anxiety, bustle, and worry, that every one agreed that she seemed to need it badly.





CHAPTER XII.

AFTER some time Ellen succeeded in letting the house to an old gentleman with two daughters. He was so much delighted with the furniture and fittings that he would not have anything altered, but agreed to pay a large sum for them just as they were. This pleased poor Ellen very much, as she was now able to pay off the servants and settle her money accounts.

About this time, too, she received a letter from a young lady friend, asking her jokingly if she happened to know any respectable person who wanted to rent a house in Wales for the *winter* months, very *cheaply*, as her papa had been called to London on particular business, and he had kindly consented to take her with him, so she expected to have a very jolly time of it. "How fortunate!" said Ellen to herself, as the bright vision of her friend's pretty home rose before her, "this will suit me beautifully." For Rosy had so often talked of the fine fun they would have together there, when Ellen came to visit her—what mountain-climbing and sea-bathing!—till it seemed to her the healthiest, brightest place in the whole world, from her friend's description of it. Here Ellen arranged to go without Dame Margery's knowledge, for she knew the old lady was very lavish of invitations to her particular friends, and there was nothing Ellen wanted less in her Welsh home than such visitors as the Dame was likely to choose. Most people now thought they were going to travel on the Continent, and came to wish them a pleasant journey, so Ellen did not undeceive them.

It was arranged that they should start on a certain day, making the journey by easy stages. They were to travel in their own carriage, their only attendant being

Bill Sykes, the coachman, who was to return soon after he had deposited them in their new abode. And Ellen's heart grew lighter day by day as the time drew near for their departure. Her money affairs had assumed a brighter aspect. "It will cost very little to live there," she thought, "and we need not have any company. I shall love to climb the great rugged mountains and pick the bright wild flowers. Rosy has often told me how beautiful they are; and I will send for her, when we have got a bit settled—she will be sure to come; and oh, what fun we will have together! and I shall really see the sea." And Ellen clapped her hands with delight, for till now it had only been a far-off dream to her.

The old gentleman who was to rent her mansion was very kind to Ellen and her grandma, and spoke pleasantly of the time when they should be able to visit him and his daughters, one of whom was about the same age as Ellen—they would be such nice companions for each other, he said. "Shall you come back to this neighbourhood when you return from your tour? It would give me such great pleasure to welcome you again."

"I must refer you to Ellen," said the Dame, "she has her own way in everything. I am obliged to content myself with only following wherever she leads."

"Ah, madam, you are indeed happy in having so sweet a tyrant. She could not utter an unkind or hasty word, I am sure, she looks so perfectly amiable. I would give all I possess to have as fair a guide, madam." And he glanced admiringly at Ellen, who stood blushing, not knowing what to say, in answer to such unusual language. He praised Ellen's exquisite taste in her choice of furniture, and especially that of her private rooms.

When he had wished them good-bye, with many protestations of firm friendship, the old Dame turned to Ellen and said, "What a *very nice old gentleman*, to be sure!"

"I didn't like him a *bit*," replied her granddaughter proudly. "He seemed to be telling falsehoods all the while, and stood staring so rudely at me, that I didn't know where to hide my face. No one ever treated me like that before. I sincerely hope we shall get away from here before his daughters come; they must be very nasty disagreeable girls, if they take after him. I'm sure I shouldn't like them; and it's all nonsense to talk about us visiting here. We cannot afford it, Dame Margery. They are rich folks, and you and I are poor. We shall have to begin life in a very humble way, as soon as we are clear of Aer Hall and our new-made

friends. I really think, grandma dear, we shall be much happier in a little humble cottage than we have been here surrounded by grandeur," and Ellen drew a deep sigh, as if it would be a real relief to her to get rid of such great responsibility.

At last the day of parting came ; Ellen was more full of life and spirits than ever. She skipped and frolicked about like a little girl again, rather than the sober young lady she had suddenly grown on her entrance at Aer Hall. "A farewell to the bower, grandma, and then I am ready," she said, and ran lightly down the path, getting rosier every step she took. She lifted the willow boughs and slipped under them, but started back in breathless surprise. In her own favourite chair, balanced on its two back legs, sat a young gentleman quite at ease, quietly absorbed in reading.

He didn't glance off his book at Ellen, so she began to slip quietly back again through the willow branches, hoping he wouldn't look up and see her ; but when she was just disappearing, he lifted his large blue eyes, with a mischievous look in them, which told her at once he had been watching all the time, and said in a very quiet voice, "You need not be in any hurry, lady fair. I am here especially to talk with you. Sit down and listen." Ellen gasped and obeyed ;

his voice was so very sweet, something like Follow-my-Lead's, only deeper and altogether more masculine ; his eyes, too, had the same merry puzzling way of looking through one which she knew so well. " I am commissioned to restore your goods to you before you quit Aer Hall. They are none the worse for their little trip into Fairyland, I can assure you," and he placed the casket with the beads bound round it upon the table. " They have seen a great many reverses since they left you," he said, looking down affectionately on them, " and your old friend Follow-my-Lead has become quite a *hero* in Fairyland fighting for them. There were seven battles in all. He and his followers won five ; and they have acquitted themselves so well that at last he is able to return them in perfect safety to you. It was Spitfire herself who told you to put your casket and beads in the different birds' nests : that being a very easy way for her to gain possession of them. She had vowed to do so, and therefore deceived you by imitating the Prince's voice and touch, knowing you could not see, and trusting you would not perceive the difference. Her plot, you know, met with perfect success. But the Prince, although banished, soon heard the news, and immediately began to prepare to wrest them from her at any cost. He sent messages by the mining imps to his own followers.

They flocked at once to his side, and proceeded to arm themselves for battle. Spitfire, too, had persuaded many fairies to join her against the Prince's army, to protect fairies' rights, as she called them. I have told you the result of those battles which followed. You may take your property without fear now—it has been bravely won for you," and he quietly kneeled down on one knee and presented casket and beads to the trembling Ellen.

"No, no, thank you, sir," she said, pushing his hand aside, "I shall be far happier without them, although it sounds very ungrateful in me to say so; but, thanks to my good kind friend, I shall have quite enough for granny and me to live upon. I would rather not be rich and have so much depending upon me. I am a great deal happier in leaving all this splendour behind than I felt when I first came into it. Take the casket to Fairyland again—I do not want it; but I would like to keep the beads, perhaps they may some day bring me a sight of dear little Follow-my-Lead again.

"Ah," said the young gentleman rising and placing the rejected treasure carefully upon her lap, "you are very fond of him, I suppose."

"Yes, indeed I am," said Ellen earnestly, tears starting into her eyes as she spoke. "I like him

much better than all the fine things he has given me. If he could only come and talk to me again as he used to do I should be happy in the humblest cottage. But tell me more about him, please, sir, as you seem to know so much. Where is he now ? In prison again, I suppose."

"Ah no, fair lady, unless *you* have put him there," replied her companion. "He has left Fairyland for some time, and is wandering in different forms about this hard solid earth of yours, no one knows exactly where or how. He had his choice of Gnome Land, Western Elfland, and Nereid Land, when the King banished him, but he chose to come Earthward instead, and hover between the three. It was after the last battle with Spitfire that their Majesties became so angry. The quarrel grew fiercer and fiercer, until it disturbed their whole realm, and then they were obliged to interfere for the sake of peace and order. Although their hearts were really with the Prince, it would never do to let a subject make war unpunished. Spitfire was fearfully maimed and injured, and it will take her some weeks to recover her strength, so until she does, they sentenced your fairy-friend to banishment. He must not enter his own provinces or rule in his own castle ; but after that time he is to be received back again, and having rendered a satisfactory account of his wayfarings here,

to have his possessions and title restored with a large share of honour. Spitfire in the meantime is to enjoy his revenues."

"What a shame!" said Ellen. "She is such a nasty, spiteful fairy. It only served her right to be hurt. I don't wonder at my dear little friend getting angry; it was such a mean thing to deceive me, like she did. Poor fellow! what will he do now? With no home—not even a grandma to live with him."

"He contrived to smuggle a few treasures out of Fairyland, I believe," said the young gentleman. "He'll be a sort of will-o'-wisp among you sober, earnest, steady-going people—here this minute and nowhere to be found the next. For instance, he has with him one small piece of looking-glass which a fairy magician gave him. If he holds it before his heart, so that people may look in the face of it, they see exactly whatever shape he wishes them to, and so deceives their sight that they would positively swear a real live human being stood before them—talking, walking, and breathing, exactly as they do themselves—while it is only an optical illusion. This he can make to vanish directly by turning the front of the glass towards himself, and by desiring not to be seen, only blank unoccupied space is immediately left to the human eye. Then again he has a magic disc,

on which the thoughts of people become photographed as they pass through their brain. So he will find plenty of amusement, I daresay."

"I liked him better as Prince Follow-my-Lead than I ever shall as anything else," said Ellen sorrowfully. "I only wish I could see him once, especially as I am leaving here almost directly, and he may not know where to find me amongst those Welsh mountains." And as she rose to go she naturally caught hold of the casket to prevent it from falling, and her hand unintentionally touched the beads. "Thank you, sir, very much, for your kindness. I must hurry away now. Grandma will be tired of waiting for me. What a dreadfully long time I have been here! Good-bye." And she raised her eyes to the stranger's face, at which he burst into a merry peal of laughter, just like that which stirred so many echoes in Dame Margery's little cottage, and Ellen immediately caught it up without being able to help doing so, and at the same instant recognized her little friend Follow-my-Lead; but before she could control herself enough to tell him how glad she was to be near him again—only an empty chair remained where he had been sitting!

CHAPTER XIII.



ELLEN looked down suddenly at the little casket, and saw that her name had been written upon it in rows of brilliants.

"Dear Prince," she said, as a bright tear fell from her eyes, "he has been severely punished for favouring me. I am glad Spitfire is hurt ; and he won't be unhappy while banished from Fairyland, because he has brought so many amusing things with him."

Then putting her treasures carefully in her pocket, so that no one might see them, she parted the willow boughs and was soon hurrying towards the house.

Meanwhile her new tenants had unexpectedly arrived. Dame Margery was bustling about with a great deal of importance, and began to scold Ellen as

soon as she made her appearance for having kept her waiting so long.

"The carriage and horses have been standing at the door this last hour," said the Dame. "I began to think some accident had happened to you. What in the world have you been doing? you get stranger and stranger every day, I do believe."

"Very likely," replied Ellen.

Quietly walking into the library, she seated herself before her writing-table, and leisurely ordering one of the servants to fetch her a small bag which she had left upon the dressing-table in her bed-room, she carefully took the casket out of her pocket and placed it gently in the bag, which she hung on her arm, and then proceeded at once to say good-bye.

Soon the horses were whirling their light burden along the country road. Noake was left far behind them, and not a single regret remained in Ellen's heart.

For three days they travelled without any adventure, taking meals and sleeping at different inns on the road. But on the fourth day, while stopping for dinner at a little market-town named Brankinshaw, a very heavy thunderstorm came on, which lasted until late at night, so they were obliged to put up there until the morning.

They had just finished dinner, when another traveller arrived—this time a gentleman—tall, thin, dark-haired, and heavily moustached, wearing spectacles. He seemed very much alarmed at the thunder, and complained of headache. He spoke English with a French accent, and ordered dinner in a private room ; but the inn being very small, their one parlour was occupied by Ellen and her grandmother. So the landlord informed him, that unless the ladies upstairs did not object to his company, he would be obliged to take his repast either in the little tap-room or his own bedroom.

“They seem to be very nice people. I’ll just step upstairs and ask them,” he said.

So while the foreigner appeared to be framing a sentence, which should make him desist, the question had been put to them.

Ellen replied that she had no objection to make. “We intend retiring for the night almost directly, as we have had several long days’ journey, and would therefore be glad to rest. The gentleman can have it entirely to himself,” she said. And after a courteous good-night both she and her grandma took their candles and disappeared, Ellen leading the way.

She had hardly got into her room before she missed the little bag containing her casket and purse, pre-

sently remembering that she had put it upon a side table in the parlour while having dinner. For a few minutes she stood wondering whatever she should do. At last ringing the bell violently, a small untidy-looking little servant came running to the door, and stood breathing very hard gazing up at Ellen, expecting orders.

"I have left a little bag in the room where we dined. Will you please fetch it for me?"

"Yes, miss," said the child, and disappeared.

After nearly five minutes, during which Ellen had been getting more and more alarmed about it, she returned.

"There ain't no bag there, miss. The strange gentleman hasn't never seed it, he says; and he helped me to look for it, too. Please, miss, has you put it down anywheres in here and forgot? or dropped it getting out of the carriage?"

"Go and look," said Ellen impatiently, as she walked quickly backwards and forwards like a wild animal in its cage; "be quick, and I will give you a bright gold sovereign, if you find it."

"Yes, miss," the child replied, and darted down the passage, after one quick look of pleasure up at Ellen.

The carriage was searched, the coach-house

searched — kitchen, tap-room, passages — everybody questioned about the bag, but still it was not found. It had most mysteriously vanished in a few seconds.

At last Ellen got quite angry. She threw on her dressing-gown and determined to look for it herself. "I know I laid it upon that side-table. This stranger cannot be so uncourteous as to refuse me. And if it is not there he must certainly be a thief, and I will have all his pockets and luggage searched before he goes out of this house—see if I don't." And along the passage she passed with the air of an offended princess. She tapped at the door.

"Come in," said a low voice in answer to her knock.

Ellen entered, the stranger rising from his seat and bowing nearly to the ground, as she did so.

"I left a bag here a few minutes ago, sir. Will you kindly permit me to search for it? It may have fallen on the floor, for the maid I sent was not able to find it."

"Allow me to assist you, mademoiselle. I am grieved that so great a misfortune has befallen; yet most honoured—since it has given me the plus exquisite plaisir of beholding so great loveliness," and he bowed, with his hand upon his heart, nearly to the floor again.

Ellen glanced sideways at him without turning her head, and continued the search, but no bag was anywhere to be found.

"It is one great mystère," said the gentleman, planting himself full in front of Ellen, "and though I may be deeply grieved that mademoiselle should suffer loss, yet the plus grand plaisir mademoiselle's presence gives me is not to be expressed in language;" and again he bent from the middle like a pair of nut-crackers.

Ellen was almost crying with anger, and altogether out of patience with his staring and foolish way of speaking. She found the search was all in vain—she had humbled her pride for nothing—so she hurried towards the door without saying "Thank you, I'm afraid it is lost," as she would have done another time, and was closing the door after her, when he rushed forward, and holding it wide open, gave another of his detestable bows, as Ellen inwardly called them, and then stood in the doorway kissing his hand to her as she hurried down the long passage.

Suddenly a thought of her grandma came in her head—she would stop and ask for her advice about the bag before she accused that impudent man of stealing it. She herself was almost *sure* he had taken it. So stopping at her grandma's door, she knocked

gently, but no answer. The old lady was certainly asleep — she could hear her snoring — but as the young man was still standing watching her intently, she *would not* go away unanswered. So she knocked louder this time and called out “Grandma!” as loudly as she could.

“What’s the matter?” said a harsh voice from within; “is the house a-fire? What do you say? I can’t understand a word. You’ve lost your bag? No, I sha’n’t get up and let you in, you stupid child—to make such a worry about it. You left it upon the side-table, and as you were going out of the room, of course I picked it up and took it with me. It’s on my dressing-table now. There, go to bed,” said the old lady, opening the door just wide enough to pass it through. “What a silly child you are, to be sure.” And grumbling at having been obliged to turn out of bed, the old lady shut and locked her door, leaving Ellen blushing at her suspicions of the stranger, and ashamed of having given so much trouble about it. “It *was* foolish of me,” thought Ellen, “not to have asked grandma first.”

The Frenchman was still watching. She tripped lightly back to him, in her penitence for supposing him a thief, and said—

“I beg pardon, sir, for having troubled you about

my loss. Grandma had taken it up as she went from the room, without my knowledge. I am sorry I did not think of asking her before—"good-night," and she almost ran to her room amidst a shower of sweet congratulations from the young gentleman as he watched her depart.

"What a stupid young man he is!" said Ellen to herself, as she burst into a fit of laughter, and almost fell into an easy-chair in her bedroom. "I hope I shall not see him again to-morrow;" but for all that she went to bed and dreamed of a goggle-eyed Frenchman staring at her through dark-blue spectacles—long straggling black hair falling each side of a thin yellow-looking face, a moustache which evidently grew on purpose to supply perpetual employment for a long white finger and thumb in curling the ends of it upwards.



CHAPTER XIV.



NEXT morning Ellen
awoke early, and
her first thought
was for the little
bag which had
caused her so
much trouble the
night before, and,
lifting her pillow,
there it lay, nestled
down into the bol-
ster, safe and
sound.

She began to dress herself, singing snatches of songs now and then in the happiness of her heart. Birds were chirruping gaily and flying in and out of the overhanging eaves which shaded her window, for that part of the inn was thatched with straw. She

threw open the lattice, and a sweet, invigorating freshness floated in, and waved the scrupulously clean window-curtains lazily backwards and forwards, to the tune of a bright painted signboard which hung just below, which creaked dreamily on its squeaking rusty hinges. Fowls were straying idly about over the cobbly courtyard. There was a long wooden trough for horses to drink out of on one side, under the shade of a large beech-tree. The hum of insects, the sound of distant voices, all seemed to add their own enjoyment to Ellen's, as she stood gazing out on the bright unclouded sky and rich hazy landscape stretching far away. Field after field, dotted with tiny white specks, which Ellen knew to be sheep, with here and there a herd of cows, until all was lost in distance.

Presently a timid hand knocked softly at Ellen's door. Ellen opened it, and the little maid of last night stood before her.

"Please, miss, the other lady wants to know what you would like for breakfast," she said.

"Is the lady in her bedroom or not?" questioned Ellen.

"She is in the parlour, miss, and told me to say she had been waiting for you this half hour. I was to ask you to *hurry*, if you please, miss."

"I'll come at once," said Ellen, hastily taking the

little bag from under her pillow, and making her way to the breakfast-table ; and there, to her astonishment, was Dame Margery sitting at the tray pouring out coffee and chatting most pleasantly with the stranger whose acquaintance Ellen had made last night. He was profoundly polite to the old lady, and evidently enjoying her conversation immensely. She was talking as fast as her tongue would let her, but when Ellen entered stopped short, and a dead silence fell over the little room instantly. "Of course, grandma always treats strangers just as if they were old friends," thought Ellen, "and she's been telling him all about me, I know, or she wouldn't have left off so suddenly when I came in."

The gentleman rose with many apologies, handed her a chair, and everything she might be likely to want that was upon the table, and then began to overwhelm her with compliments upon her appearance, her dress, and exquisite taste, never once removing his eyes from her, while she commenced her breakfast. Of course she became more and more embarrassed and uncomfortable, until, feeling that she could not stand it any longer, she got up, spoke a few hurried words in her grandma's ear, and went out of the room breakfastless, angry, and annoyed.

She sat down in her own bedroom after having

rang the bell violently ; the little maid answered it at once.

“ I want a separate breakfast sent to me here,” she said, “ and the carriage to be ready in half an hour.”

In the meantime she set herself to think—“ *Who* can he be ? I wish grandma *would learn* not to talk so freely to utter strangers. I do hate that man.” Then with a little stamp of her foot on the floor she said bitterly, “ If I am to be insulted like this, I shall wish I had never come ; and what would happen *then*, I wonder, for even fairies cannot make time go back ? I’ll try and forget that man—it vexes me so. I had better take some more money from the casket and put it in my purse, so as to have it handy, and then hide the casket away for safety. It makes me *tremble* to think of the anxiety I felt last night when I believed it was *lost*. I don’t think I shall ever forget the bag again, but perhaps it would be as well to strap it to my waist underneath my mantle, and then I can hardly lose it.” So she commenced firmly buckling it on with a small strap she had taken off one of her bonnet-boxes. The little maid soon appeared with her breakfast, and said the carriage would be ready in twenty minutes, at which Ellen felt greatly relieved, and sent the child to inform the other lady in the parlour of this, to her, unwelcome news.

While Ellen was finishing her solitary meal and arranging herself for the journey the old lady had it all her own way with the Frenchman. She invited him to travel with them as far as Dover, where they intended—so she said—starting for France.

He most gratefully accepted her kindness, as—he said—he also was bound for Paris, and should be most happy—delighted—honoured to accompany them.

This the little maid having heard, came and repeated to Ellen, who immediately boiled over with wrath, and sent a message to her grandma, to the effect that she must come at once and speak to her on business of importance directly.

The gentleman raised Dame Margery's hand to his lips gracefully, and bending after the fashion of nut-crackers, said he should await her return with impatience in the parlour, since she took all its sunshine away with her ; and then he stood watching *her* departing form hobbling down the narrow passage, just as he did Ellen's the night before, and never closed the parlour door until Ellen's bedroom was reached.

“ Well, *what is* the matter with you this morning, Ellen ? I never saw such queer behaviour *in all my life !* And he such a gentleman too, so polite and mannerly. I declare I'm quite ashamed of you, that I

am. Not a civil word for him or me either, when you came hurrying into the room as if you hadn't a minute to live. Oh! I see you've got your breakfast here, have you? Your appetite came back pretty soon after you had thrown *us* off,—showing your nasty temper to that nice young gentleman in the other room in such an abominable way. I should have been ashamed to do it, old as I am, especially as he was so polite and obliging. And then to send for me as if I was your waiting-maid, just as he had begun to tell me such an interesting story, too, which I wanted to hear the end of badly. Now, *what* is it you want?"

"The carriage will be here in a few minutes. You must get ready at once; and mind, I will have no travelling companions—not any one except our two selves," said Ellen.

"Oh, indeed," replied the Dame, firing up. "Then you may just go alone on your fine journey for me. Another step towards France I won't budge. Ordering everything and everybody, like a born princess! You'll *do* this, and you *won't* have that! and people expected to obey you and never say a word. *You*, a poor little penniless orphan a few months ago! No one must dare to cross your will in a single thing. Oh dear! *what* is the world coming to, I wonder! I tell you I will go back again, and not one step forward

—so there I” And the old Dame sat herself down with a firm determined thump, as though her mind was thoroughly made up beyond the power of alteration, and Ellen might take her own course alone if she chose—she intended to have nothing more to do with her.

“But, grandma,” said Ellen, after a few minutes’ silence, “we are not going to *France* at all. I kept it a secret until now ; but I have arranged to take a house in *Wales*, and the housekeeper expects us there in a few days. So you had better explain this to the gentleman, and all will be settled at once.”

But the old lady only mumbled and grumbled to herself and paid not the slightest heed to Ellen’s words.

“Don’t you see, grandma, we are going quite another road ? Besides, it would not be right any way to have this young man, who is a perfect stranger, going with us everywhere, just as if he belonged to us. I shouldn’t mind so much if he was old or even not so fussy. Then, perhaps, people wouldn’t notice, or make remarks about him ; but now, really he behaves so very strangely I feel as if I could not possibly put up with his stupid ways.”

“Very well, child,” said the Dame, in a half-relenting voice. “It don’t make much difference to

you, as I can see—he don't want you at all. He only means to be polite, poor fellow, and you are very hard upon him. However, as I said before, I have asked him to go with us—if he likes to come towards Wales, instead of going to France, he has got to, I can tell you. And if you object, I certainly shall go back, whatever may happen afterwards. So you had best think twice before you act once."

"O grandma, grandma!" said Ellen, "you know I cannot go by myself. Indeed, without you I should have no companion or friend at all. Much to my disgust, I suppose this young fellow must come, if he wants to; but I don't promise to be civil to him, grandma."

"Nobody wants you to," said the old lady. "He won't care a pin whether you are or not; he will be quite happy to talk with me—and I *like* him. So that's quite enough. You needn't say a single word to him the whole way if you don't want to. He and I get on together so well there will be no need for you to take the slightest notice. You can read a book, and I'll take care he doesn't disturb you at all."

"Well if it must be so, grandma, it must. But you had better go and hurry on your things and let him know. Here comes the carriage—make haste."

So Dame Margery returned to the parlour, and Ellen

threw on her travelling-cloak and stepped gently down-stairs, to settle with the landlord and quietly slip into the carriage before they came, and wait there for them. A beautiful little white curly dog followed her, and jumped up on Ellen's lap as she sat down, wagging his tail, and making much of her—almost asking her to take him with her. She called the ostler and asked whose it was.

"I dun no, miss," replied the man, touching his cap. "It strayed in ere last night when your carriage came I s'pose. We thought as how it were yourn. It don't never b'long to nobody yere abouts or I should have seed it afore," taking off his cap and scratching his head in perplexity. "Maybe it were the other gent's, which comed in arter you."

"How did he come?" said Ellen, a trifle inquisitively; "did he walk?"

"Lor, no, miss," replied the man. "He wor in a carriage, with two black horses, coachman, footman, all in black—it looked like a funeral hearse, it did. But arter they hed hed summut hot to drink he started em orf. I didn't catch the name quite plain, but it sounded summut like Tadpole. And there's no town, or nothink of that name, nowheres nigh yere, so maybe it wor sum furrin part he ment."

"This is a sweet little dog, I should like it ever so

much," said Ellen, playing with it. "What a pair of lovely eyes it has! Oh, there's a collar on its neck. Stand still, can't you?" she said to the dog, who persisted in frisking round and round upon her lap, trying to kiss her cheek now and then in its playfulness, in spite of her efforts to hold him still, so that she might read his name. At last, after a good many struggles, she managed to spell it—"Whymper." "Down, Whymper, down—you are making a mistake, good dog—you fancy I am your mistress. Ah, you must be a great pet. I'd love you very much if you were mine; but now you must go away, Whymper—down, down!"

"Ah, if mademoiselle would only honour me by accepting the leetle daug, it would make her humble adorer"—laying his hand on his heart as he spoke, and bending in two like nutcrackers again—"only too, too happy," and the French acquaintance of last night appeared standing at the other side of the carriage.

Ellen immediately pushed the dog away almost savagely.

"I had no idea he *was* yours, sir," she said, with a cold, proud accent, "or I should not on any account have permitted his caresses for a moment. I thought the people of the inn owned him; but I might have known better by his *extreme* friendliness."

"Ah, mademoiselle, you are cruel, very *cruel*. You plant arrows in my bosom"—but he smiled as if more amused than offended at her rudeness. "Ah, here we have the kind lady, your grandma; and she has entreated my company to the next market town, where we must bid adieu. My heart is broke that you go not to France, *ma belle*. Ah, but you lose, you know not what, of plaisir. Permit me to assist, madam," and he comfortably placed the old lady in the carriage, arranging rugs, boxes, and cushions with the tenderest care for her well-being; and lastly, jumping in himself and shutting the door. "My poor leetle daug," he said, with a sigh. "No, no, you cannot come." For the poor little thing ran madly round and round the carriage, and then kept jumping up at the door, whining and trying with all its tiny strength to get in with them.

The ostler caught it up as it fell against the cobbly stones, and almost stunned itself for an instant, but it began struggling again, as the coachman mounted, and he held it tight, for fear of its being run over or kicked by the horses.

"No, no, Whympers—be quiet; the lady will not permit."

Dame Margery frowned at Ellen.

"Why can't the dog come if it is yours, sir? I

will take care it doesn't offend her. What a pretty creature it is! Here, my man, give it to me," said Dame Margery, extending her hand to the ostler for it.

"Alas! no, madam," said the stranger, thrusting the dog aside, "it is objectionable to the young lady. It can be sent on in a day or two. I may not willingly offend mademoiselle."

"Nonsense," said the Dame, more determined than ever about it, since she rather coveted the pretty little creature herself, and longed to thwart Ellen for her ungraciousness—"Nonsense. *I* should *like* him to come; people cannot have *all* their own way in this world, and it's not good for them they should. Ellen's a trifle out of temper this morning, that's all. Here, my good man, hand me the dog," and she almost snatched it out of the man's arms as the carriage drove off.



CHAPTER XV.



AFTER this the stranger and Dame Margery kept up a continual flow of conversation. They both seemed to be very happy, and enjoying each other's company exceedingly—although, as the stranger sat opposite to Ellen, he would occasionally glance over the way at her with a very merry wicked look from behind the blue spectacles. He was evidently enjoying Ellen's position to the utmost. Now and then their eyes met, and every time this happened she drew herself up with scornful dignity, and throwing a freezing glance back at him sat perfectly stiff and motionless for a long time, with her eyes fixed on her hands. Yet whenever by chance she unconsciously raised them, there were the two opposite peering at her from behind the blue glasses, saying as plainly as eyes could say, "It's jolly fun to me to see you look so angry; I don't care a morsel about your poutings and

severe looks. You may be just as cross as ever you like—it will only make me enjoy being here all the more."

At last Ellen became so irritable she could hardly bear herself, but was too proud to say a single word to either of them, and bit her lips until she nearly made them bleed. After a few hours like this they stopped to take refreshment. The stranger handed Dame Margery out of the carriage, but took no notice whatever of Ellen, leaving her to manage the best way she could all by herself. This last slight was almost too much for her. She hurried out so hastily that her foot caught in the carriage rug, and threw her heavily to the ground, striking her head against a mounting-block, by the side of the inn door.

In an instant the coachman and two or three countrymen who happened to be loitering about there just then, lifted her up and carried her into the house, for the fall had stunned her. They laid her carefully upon a sofa, bathed her face and hands with cold spring water, while her grandmother and the stranger stood looking on dumb with surprise and sorrow.

However, she soon regained consciousness, but looked very pale and frightened, and the doctor who was sent for said she must not travel any further that day, as her nerves were a great deal shaken. So it was

arranged for them to stay here, and the travelling-bags were again unpacked at mid-day, the horses were put up, and meals ordered, as they had been at the other little inn—very similar in appearance to this—where they had stayed last night.

But the stranger called Dame Margery aside and confided his doubts to her. The young lady, he said, evidently did not wish that he should accompany them; so with many regrets for the loss of Dame Margery's company and interesting conversation, and best wishes for her speedy recovery, and a more pleasant journey to them both, he would bid them "farewell," and continue his wearisome journey alone.

The French accent had entirely disappeared; he spoke with a sort of *unnatural* hesitation, but that was all. Ellen noticed the change instantly, but Dame Margery was too much overcome with grief at his loss to think of anything else, for she had been greatly flattered by his polite attentions to her.

Suddenly he turned round and faced Ellen, then quickly drew the glasses from his eyes, and gave her one short bright merry glance, held out his hand—" *Au revoir*, fair lady. I hope to have your pardon another day," and with a gentle inclination of his head, he disappeared through the open door.

Ellen hastily sat up, and supporting herself on one

arm, looked after him as he went out, dumb with sheer astonishment and alarm. In that one glance she had recognised her old friend, Follow-my-Lead. Now I understand the looking-glass trick, she thought to herself. Oh, if I had only remembered it before, how happy I should have been, instead of working myself into a frenzy of spite, as I did. But he won't deceive me again so easily—I shall look out for him and be on my guard another time—he will not take me unawares again as he did yesterday, I can tell him. What a shame for me to be so disagreeable! He understood all I was thinking about, and that made him look at me so knowingly from the other side of the carriage. Ah, never mind, I won't be served like this a second time. "Come here, Whympers—Whympers," and she fairly hugged the little white dog, which scampered up to her sofa madly at the first call. "You darling little fellow—grandma shall not nurse you any more. You are mine—every bit mine, I say." And Whympers nearly devoured her neck and face with kisses, as though he would say, "You are quite right. I am all yours, dear little mistress—all your very own, in spite of everything and everybody," for he only growled and snapped at Dame Margery whenever she dared to come near him, and although she tried to coax him with biscuits

and sugar, he was proof against all kindness but Ellen's. And so she was entirely cheated out of the dog's affection from that hour. But in reality she was too much pleased at finding Ellen not seriously hurt to say a cross word, or hint that anything had ever gone wrong between them.



CHAPTER XVI.



SOME few days after this, about noon, they drove into the courtyard of another little village inn, close upon the borders of Wales. Ellen was charmed with the surrounding country, and determined to rest here for the remainder of that day, hoping that she might be able to get a mountain ramble and a quiet look at the quaint old church. It was a very lovely autumn afternoon : the trees were tinted here and there with red-brown light—the wheat fields were golden with a sort of purple haze floating warmly above them—sweetness, beauty, life, and happiness seemed prisoned between the brilliant blue sky and the glowing earth.

Ellen could not rest in the little inn parlour after dinner, so leaving Dame Margery dozing in an easy-chair, and taking Whympers with her, she started off merrily towards the village church. The sweet smell of the clover fields newly mown, the birds' songs, and the faces of happy little children, who dropped a curtsy and then turned to stare at the beautifully-dressed young lady, walking so gracefully down the village street, made Ellen feel very happy and contented. So, after spending half an hour at the church, and chatting pleasantly with the old woman who showed her over it, she asked if she could not go back to the village inn through a wood which skirted one of the high hills at a little distance from there.

The woman said—"Yes. But it is a long way—four miles or thereabouts."

"I don't mind that," said Ellen, "if there is a good footpath through it."

"Oh yes, miss," she answered, "the way is easy enough, straight as an arrow,—only it be a long way for a lady like you."

"I have been used to country walks," said Ellen, and graciously bidding her attendant good afternoon, she started off merrily in the direction of the wood. It was very rich in flowers—wild flowers, which were Ellen's greatest pets. She gathered a huge straggly

bouquet of them, wandering leisurely here and there, yet always returning to the tiny path—now scrambling across a little stream as wild and irregular as the flowers themselves, now sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree to arrange some blossoming stalks which she had torn up by the root, because they would not yield to her fingers, when she tried to break them—now resting a little while by leaning against some ivy-circled tree, which stood proudly amongst its kin, like a father surrounded by his children. Presently a bright speck of colour showing above the moss and grass at some distance caught her eye—she ran, skipping lightly over brambles, broken branches, and tangled undergrowth, towards it. It was much farther away than she at first imagined, and suddenly the thought struck her—it must be getting late. She pulled out her watch, and looked at it with amazement—in about one hour or less it would be sunset. The wood seemed to grow shadowy in an instant, and Ellen scrambled back to find the path; but easy as it seemed before, she tried, and tried now in vain—perhaps because she was getting frightened. The brambles seemed more determined than ever to hold her back—she tore her dress, until it was completely spoiled, and sprained her ankle stumbling over the prickly shrubs which seemed hopelessly to surround

her now. "Oh dear! what shall I do?" she thought, almost crying with fear, for every moment the wood grew darker and she became more frightened.

Presently the sound of a child crying fell on her ear—a loud, angry sobbing, and a passionate shriek of "Don't! don't!" every now and then. Ellen limped off in the direction that the sound came, calling out as loudly as she could, "I am coming! I am coming! Don't cry so, little one,"—until suddenly a turn in the forest showed a little hut, almost covered with ivy and woodbine, seeming just like one of the forest trees, and in front of it was a well, from which a decrepit old man tried to draw up water in a bucket; but it resisted all his efforts, for as soon as he had dragged it up to the stone ridge by the rope, down it fell, splash, in the water underneath. Then he began his task again, hand over hand, pulling with all his feeble strength, until once more, when about to grasp the deluding bucket, it escaped and his labour was lost. Still he did not speak or despair, but bravely renewed the effort. His dress was a mass of different coloured rags hanging in tatters round him; his head was bound with a dirty red handkerchief, from which long strands of tangled white hair escaped and fell in dishevelled curls upon his neck. His bony arms were bare from the elbow, and brown as a beech-nut. His

face was thin, worn, and wretched, as he bent over his thankless task. But the child's cries seemed to be coming from the hut ; so Ellen stopped beside the old man, and asked if he would allow her to help him.

" Ah, my bonny lady," said he in squeaky tones, a malicious grin of satisfaction spreading over his face, " you are kind and good. You would help the poor old man. It's not so easy as you think, though," and he handed the rope to Ellen, standing quietly aside to watch her.

One, two, three strong pulls, and the bucket touched the inside rim of that wide stone coping edging the well. Ellen looked round, and called to him to take the rope while she landed it. But he had totally vanished, so nothing remained for her to do but let the bucket fall back again, splish, splash, into the well.

" I'll find him first, and then I'll come back and get the water," thought Ellen, as she turned to go into the hut. There stood a poor child tied tightly to the trunk of a tree, which had been left standing in one corner, and helped to support the rough roof of twigs which covered it. A rope was bound round her naked arms, shoulders, and legs ; and when she struggled to get free, they cut into her flesh. She was crying piteously.

Ellen felt a keen throb of pity dart through her heart at the helpless little creature's cries. She was as small as a baby of about one year old; but her face was thin, weazened, and cunning as the face of a monkey.

"Don't cry, dear," said Ellen, "but stand quite still—then I will try to untie the cord. Was it that cruel old man I saw outside just now who served you so? You poor little thing! Don't tremble like that, I won't hurt you. If you make me so nervous by shrieking I cannot do anything. Oh! try to stop for a few minutes—please do."

But at every word Ellen uttered the tiny creature screamed and writhed and wrestled with her rope, as though she was being tortured by Ellen's presence.

"Go away—you hurt me!" she shrieked, savagely showing her teeth, like a dog does before he bites; and then she sent out scream after scream. "Go away—go away! I would tear you to pieces if I could get near you. I hate you—I hate you," and she spat spitefully at Ellen, her eyes glowing like coals of fire, and her tiny fingers twitching, as if longing to get at Ellen's throat and carry out her threat.

"Why, you tiny thing, I could crush you in my arms with one strong hug," said Ellen. "Don't think I am afraid of you, for all your screaming and threats.

But since you won't let me help you, and I have to find my way back to the inn, I'll wish you a very good evening," and Ellen turned to go out of the doorway.

"Not so fast, not so fast, fair lady, if you please," said a cracked voice close to her ear, and the same old man whom she had seen at the well stood in the doorway and barred her passage out. "I am a *cruel old* man, am I? a wretched old man, indeed! But come, you don't think so badly of me as you pretend—now, do you?" and the old fellow puckered his ugly, wrinkled face into a broad grin. "You must pay toll before you go out of this door, you know."

"What's that?" said Ellen, beginning to feel her heart sinking like lead in her bosom, and after having fumbled in her pocket for her purse, found it was not there. "What *do* you mean, sir? I hav'n't any money with me, I'm sorry to say, or I would willingly give you some."

"No, no, fair lady—money won't do, even if you offered me houses full of it. I want something far better and sweeter than that. It's not often an old, shrivelled, dirty-looking fellow like me gets the chance of kissing *pretty* ladies"—and he smacked his lips at the thought, and came sidling up to Ellen, smirking and smiling in the most hideous fashion. "Just one

little wee kiss," he said, and bent his head quite close to her dainty lips.

"Not for worlds," said Ellen, starting back almost sick with disgust. "You nasty, ugly, dirty old thing—I would die sooner than kiss you. Why, I wouldn't touch you with a pair of tongs if I could help it. Kiss you, indeed! Not if I have to stay here all my life. Go away; you make me feel quite sick to look at you—you horrible old thing. Let me go—I'll shriek if you touch me," for he laid his hand suddenly upon the beads which circled her wrist.

Instantly she wished herself back again at the inn—a dizziness came over her eyes, the dirty hovel and its occupants began to grow dim and misty, and the next moment she heard the faint ticking of a clock. The sensation of faintness was gone, and she opened her eyes to find herself lying upon a sofa by the side of her own bedroom window at the little inn.

"When shall we get to that nice snug house near the sea-shore and the Welsh Mountains, I wonder! We have still many miles to go, and I'm getting downright weary of this tedious travelling."

"Ah, grandma, is that you?" she said, as the old lady entered her room, but started back in surprise to see some one lying upon the sofa.

"Why, child, when did you come in? I have been

so anxious about you. Whympy came back alone two hours ago, and I was just going to start some men into the forest to look after you. I only came here to fetch a wrap because I thought you might be cold. How glad I am that you are here. Have you been home long ? ”

“ No,” said Ellen faintly. “ I have only just come in. I am very tired. Will you get me a cup of tea as soon as possible, and then I’ll go to bed. My nerves are still a little weak, grandma. I got rather frightened in the wood—lost my way ; see how I have torn my sleeves and skirt, granny. I’m afraid you won’t be able to mend them for me—they are altogether *too* bad.”

And the old lady tripped downstairs with a heavy weight taken off her heart to inform the landlord that her grandchild had returned, dismiss the men, and order tea for Ellen.



CHAPTER XVII.



THEY continued their journey from this point without any further adventure, and were entering the pretty seaport village Ellen had so often pictured to herself, when the first view of the great ocean burst on their sight—rich with sunset clouds. Both Ellen and her grandma were talking, but they stopped instantly—a cold sharp thrill of wonder and awe seemed to pass through them, each drew a deep long breath and caught at the other's hands, as though they had been suddenly thrust into the presence of a great living Deity.

Soon the carriage stopped at a quaint unpretending

white house, with close-clipped box-trees on each side of the front door, heavily-mullioned windows, half hidden by trailing stems of the passion-flower, intermingled here and there with the stronger growth of Wistaria. It was a restful-looking old-fashioned place, that promised plenty of comfort within. Not another house was to be seen anywhere, for the village itself only consisted of the few fishers' cottages they had passed, with a very tiny red-brick church and vicarage. There were cloud-topped mountains rising behind it, and the long broad heaving ocean in front, with its shingly beach and huge weed-covered boulders, like the ruins of mighty temples and huge gigantic castles, thrown down upon the shore at random by an earthquake, or giant arms stronger than human imagination can conceive.

The neat, white-capped housekeeper greeted our travellers with many curtsies. A bright fire was burning in the long dining-room, and gave a cheerful welcome to our wearied little friend, who quietly slid into a cosy arm-chair, after throwing her hat and cloak upon the table.

She had determined to leave the whole management of this house to grandma, so as to have as easy and merry a time in it as she could. So, while the old lady was inspecting everything and arranging for

meals, Ellen gave herself up to the luxury of thinking about nothing in particular ; and, whether it was the fresh air or warmth of the fire, or both combined, she soon fell fast asleep.

The first few days of Ellen's rambles on the sides of those Welsh mountains seemed like weeks to her : everything around was so new and strange, that she forgot to be lonely in her longing to discover new wonders amongst the rock caves on the seashore, or tangled coverts of the mountain heath, where precious flowers often hid their blossoms from the sun. How pretty, too, the tiny fishing village looked from that distance, lying in its soft green valley—the cottages merest specks of bright red, while fishing-boats were continually coming and going on the great restless space of water, the unlading of whose freights formed the only excitement of that little quiet world where fate had just now thrown Ellen's life.

One evening at sunset the first sensation of loneliness which she had yet experienced came over her. " I wish I had Rosy here," she murmured ; " there is no one to talk to, and in these wild parts the fisher people do not understand me, and only stare with wonder if I say a word to them. Rosy could teach me so much, for she understands all their ways. How nice it would be to find her sitting cosily by

granny's side to-night waiting for me, when I get home," and unconsciously she turned her steps towards the old white house, lying almost entirely hidden by its orchard trees in the valley. A large willow-tree had fallen some years ago over a tiny mountain stream; no one had troubled to remove it, but accepted it as a



self-made bridge until the roundness of the trunk was worn almost flat by the passers' feet, while the branches yet spread upwards their thick green foliage. Over this Ellen had to pass. Just as she had put her foot cautiously between the nearest branches, she heard something go—gurggle, gurggle—splish, splash—into the water. She shrank back, expecting to see a wild bird

or large water-rat at least, floating upon the stream ; but there was no unusual agitation whatever in the placid, rippling, transparent water hastening swiftly downwards over the red-coloured pebbles, and Ellen felt a weird, cold sensation steal through her whole frame. She clasped her hands together, and said softly to herself, "Oh dear, I don't like being alone."

The next instant she saw what appeared to be a little child's rosy roguish face peeping at her from among the boughs of the fallen tree. Ellen's heart sank in her bosom like lead. She held her breath and stood still as a statue, too much afraid to cry for help, yet expecting that the child would fall into the water every instant.

At last her voice came back to her, and she whispered hoarsely, "Take care, little one. Hold tight where you are. Don't move your hands till I come. Hold tight for your life. One minute longer I will come close enough for you to spring down to me ;" and then, by sheer force of will, she dragged herself almost exactly beneath the swaying branch where the child was clinging, and holding up her two arms, told the little one to drop.

Hardly were the words out of her mouth before a heavy weight fell into them. The tiny creature was enormously heavy for her size, and seemed as

wild and savage as a young tiger, for she clutched Ellen's bracelet between her teeth spitefully, and tore it apart, spilling all the milk-white beads on the green bank, where they poured down and rolled away under the long grass, thistles, and high-climbing weeds. Not one was to be seen anywhere near.

"Ah, what *have* you done, you wicked child?" cried Ellen, almost throwing her out of her arms; but the mischievous little imp only glanced up at her with a mocking light in her blue eyes, and laughing a very triumphant laugh, ran off with the speed of an antelope, leaping over the high grass, and sometimes clutching it with both hands, as if to support her, because she shook so with excessive laughter. And then she glanced back at Ellen as the cause of it all. However, she was soon out of sight.

When she had quite disappeared, poor Ellen sank down on her knees, and burst into tears. She had been too angry with the child to cry at first, but now the wicked little creature had gone, her loss seemed almost too great to bear. She gave way to her feelings without restraint.

Presently a thought seemed to strike her — the beads must be lying very near her feet; she had only to search for them, and they could be easily threaded again and bound round her arm. "How foolish of

me!" she said gently to herself in a consoling tone, though the sobs would break in every now and then. "There is no great harm done after all," and she began pushing aside the long grass, and was soon rewarded by finding three of her beads under it. This cheered her up a little, and she continued finding one after another until she had made up their number to eighteen—then carefully tied them together in her pocket-handkerchief, for fear of losing any. Many times she peeped into it and counted them. Still two were missing. Again and again she crawled amongst the nettles and weeds, stinging her fair white hands, until she could hardly help crying with the pain; but still those two beads defied all her efforts to find them. It began to get darker and darker, but in her trouble Ellen forgot all else, until the coming night really made itself felt. Then indeed she woke up to her danger.

"Oh, how shall I get home now?" she cried, clasping her hands hopelessly together. "I hardly know the way in daylight. I am sure to go wrong now, it is so dark. What will become of me if I lose myself?" And indeed that little white path down the mountain-side seemed hopelessly indistinct amongst the deepening shadows which crossed it at every bend.



"The softest far-away echo repeated to her ear the words 'Follow-my-Lead.'"
Page 151.

Presently Ellen heard a voice, certainly a voice, but very, *very* far away. It had a familiar ring in it—a tone which reminded her directly of her fairy friend, Follow-my-Lead. She stood breathlessly silent and listened, peering into the shadows with earnest eyes. A small mist-like cloud which floated at her feet seemed to be forming itself into the proportions of the same fantastic individual, while the softest far-away echo repeated to her ear the words, “Follow-my-Lead —Follow-my-Lead.”

Am I deceived? thought Ellen. Surely the figure moves; and a certain force that same moment impelled her to move also—an irresistible magnetic power, which she had no strength to stand against, drew her forward; and before she knew anything more she had crossed safely over the trunk of the fallen tree, and was silently following her mist-like guide down the mountain. For some few minutes they went on, and Ellen’s heart began to beat quickly with suppressed fear, for where might this phantom-robed creature be leading her? She dreaded to break the deathlike stillness which lay heavily on all things round; and yet a feeling came over her that she *must* speak or die. Gathering all her strength for the effort, she managed to form some half-indistinct words with trembling lips—she never knew really what they were, but her

guide seemed to understand, for he broke the deep cold silence with his far-away whisper :

“Have no care for yourself. I am pledged to take you in safety. Are old friends so quickly forgotten by Ellen that she fails to know me ? Follow-my-Lead.”

And strangely her heart regained its accustomed lightness as he spoke. The cold distrust and fear vanished, just as though they had never been ; and in a softer voice she prayed him still to keep talking to her.

“What have I to tell you ?” said the voice.

“Oh, anything—anything. About yourself I like best,” she said. “I cannot bear to be silent any longer. Tell me who were those people I met in the woods ? They both seemed so unreal I could not help connecting them somehow with fairy-folk—although I cannot account for the feeling at all.”

“Right again, Ellen,” said the voice. “You were so sure of knowing me in any guise that I turned into an old man soon after I left you at the inn, and travelled from place to place in that character, enjoying the fun of it immensely. I got into all sorts of scrapes with all sorts of people, and out of them quicker than I got in, for it was only the matter of turning my small piece of looking-glass face inwards, and their astonishment at my disappearance was thoroughly

enjoyable, especially as I was quite out of their reach. I knew very well how you were spending your time, so determined to meet you at your first long halt, and have some more fun in the same character of a ragged dirty old man ; but fortune, the fortune of fairies, ordained it to have a far different ending from that I anticipated. Very soberly I was limping on my crutches down the village street that sunny afternoon. The children stared at me, but no one questioned my right to be there. I enjoyed the pleasant sights and sounds of the great heavy world to which I was banished. Presently a white pigeon flew quickly past my face, so close that its wings almost bore my piece of glass away with it. I turned to the small pocket disc at once, and perceived that what had appeared to be a pigeon was in reality a fairy colleague of mine—one in great favour with our royal master. ‘He has flown towards the forest,’ said I to myself, ‘hoping to hold some conversation with me,’ and hastened thither as swiftly as my human disguise would permit. Not many minutes had I reached its shadowy depths before I saw a poor worn meagre child, stretched upon the grass, writhing and groaning with pain. At first something akin to pity moved me to help this forlorn creature, so destitute and miserable. I kneeled down beside her, but hardly had I done so

than she raised herself and sprang at my neck, clasp-
ing it with all her force—her whole face changing into
one fierce expression of deadly determination. She
clung as a dying man is said to cling to the friendly raft.
I recognised in an instant my old enemy Spitfire, and
knew at once she had followed me for some evil pur-
pose ; but pretending to think she was only a poor
human child who had lost her way, I spoke kind
soothing words to her, and after awhile softly unclasped
her hands and carried her a mile or two into the
forest, pretending that I was bearing her home. Why
she allowed herself to be deceived I know not ; but
all this time I was forming my plans how to deal with
her. Suddenly I came upon the little hut, where you
found us, and dropping her there under the pretext of
getting water from the well to quench her thirst, for
she begged me to give her something to drink, I
slipped the cord round her, and before she could
defend herself, bound her to the tree where you saw
her. She never resisted my efforts in the least,
knowing that no cord made by human hands had
power to detain a fairy. So she laughed and mocked
at me all the while I tied her up, bidding me make it
firm—to be sure I had tied the knot with a double
twist—I must be clever indeed if one stroke of hers
could not throw it off her in much less time than I

had taken to bind it on. But for once my fair friend was mightily mistaken. The rope happened to have been woven years ago in Fairyland, and amongst other things, I had borne it with me in my banishment, hoping some day to find a use for it. Luckily, it has served my turn well. When she found out her mistake her rage was terrific—she chafed, writhed, and cut the flesh she had assumed from her wrists and ankles—but until she begged for mercy, I only stood within safe distance and calmly looked on. For two days and nights she endured this self-inflicted torture, and then her spirit suddenly broke down ; she grew mild, almost timid, and deigned to listen quietly whenever I spoke. Now I knew the time had come to make my peace with his royal majesty, King of Northern Fairyland. She—Spitfire—should be allowed to go free once more only on condition that she earnestly entreated our Sovereigns to recall me at once from banishment. If they held out, she should employ all her influence with the other princes who loved me well, to join in a grand petition for my pardon, and never leave a stone unturned until my rights were again acceded to me. This she swore to do by the most binding oath of Fairyland. I accordingly untied and released her. She kept her promise faithfully, for you see I have taken my old form again."

"Alas!" said Ellen, "I can hardly distinguish you at all. You seem little more than a faint white half-shapen mist, hurrying on in front of me. Your voice even sounds nearly half a mile away, and yet you say I can *see* you."

"Do you not remember our Fairy Queen coming to your bower and putting her seal on your eyes, that you might never see fairy-form again? Your sight is coming back or you would not even discern the *white mist*, as you call me; and having got so far on the road towards recovery, no doubt all will come back to you again some day. But there are a few conditions that must be fulfilled first," and a faint sigh followed these last words.

"So you have gone back to your own people for good," said Ellen sorrowfully. "Are you happier there!"

But no answer came to her. That light shade which had led her down the mountain safely was not to be seen anywhere, and Ellen found herself before the front gate of her present home.

A magical effect had been wrought in her absence. Strange men hurried to and fro in the stable-yard, swaying their lighted lanterns carelessly in their hands. Some were humming snatches of strange songs as they went; some were gathered in groups talking earnestly;

others were laughing, but the whole made a very lively scene—quite a contrast to its usual prim, orderly, quiet appearance. Lights gleamed from every window of the house ; bustle and excitement evidently prevailed within as well as without.

Ellen stood with her hand resting on the latch of the garden gate, afraid to lift it in case this scene of enchantment should vanish as suddenly as it came into sight. She longed so much for human companionship and sympathy, that her heart was beating with great throbs of pleasure as she stood gazing there. Presently the hall-door opened and her grandma peered anxiously out, first glancing one side of the garden, then the other, and at last beckoned to some men who were idling near the stable. They immediately hurried to her, and stood silently listening while she talked. Evidently she intended sending them on some errand. Ellen could not quite catch all the words, but her own name was mentioned more than once. Then the truth flashed suddenly upon her—grandma is sending those men to find me ; yes, that is it. What a pity to disappoint them all ! but I must do it. So she threw the gate open with a bang ; and the next instant was making her way through the thick group of astonished fishermen, just as they were departing on their search.

But her absence was not by any means the cause

of all this excitement. Before her grandma could either scold or embrace her, she had caught sight of a well-known figure tripping, candle in hand, down the old-fashioned stairs.

"Ah Rosy, is it indeed you? You darling!" burst from Ellen's lips, and the two friends ran into each other's arms.

Ah! my poor beads, she thought. This is the last good thing *you* will do for me: I shall only be like other people now—no longer wish and have, as it has always been. But I *am* glad Rosy is here. She will help me search for those beads; her eyes are sharper than mine perhaps, and we will go together early to-morrow morning. I am so happy she has come—dear, *dear* Rosy. And with these thoughts Ellen dismissed all sorrow from her heart, and laughed as merrily and ran about as lightly as if nothing in the world could cause her a moment's anxiety.

Rosy's father had come with her. He was enjoying a 'rest by the cosy fireside, and chatting cheerfully with Dame Margery, as she hurried in and out, trying to make everything as comfortable as she possibly could for her travel-wearied guests. They had brought a couple of servants with them from their city home—girls whose parents had never been

more than ten miles from this secluded little village except in some neighbour's fishing-smack; for of course their fathers were fishermen. They had begged to return here with Rosy, as the town-bred housekeeper was always finding fault with them. So she persuaded her father to bring them, hoping that Ellen might be easily induced to keep them on in the old house.

It was not pleasure alone which brought these honoured visitors to Bollanw, although they promised themselves a very enjoyable holiday in their old home. It happened that an uncle of Rosy's had been very ill, and as he was now recovering, change of air and scene were absolutely necessary for him. He had written to his brother asking the loan of his house at Bollanw, not knowing that he had already lent it to Ellen and her grandmother; as the old gentleman earnestly wished to oblige his brother if possible without offending his friends, he thought he would be better able to make some amicable arrangement with Ellen about his reception if he came in person and explained matters, than by trusting to written messages, which are so often misunderstood. He told them, at any rate, whether they would accommodate his brother or not, he himself intended to inflict upon them his company for a few days at least.

And very happy indeed was the whole party—not least of all grandma, who looked years younger already since they first arrived; and she laughed more heartily at the old gentleman's jokes than ever she had done at anything which had happened since that eventful day when Follow-my-Lead made her acquaintance in the humblest cottage of that now almost forgotten village of Noake.



CHAPTER XVIII.



THE next morning Ellen was up early carolling about the house as merrily as a lark, and running with Whymper at her heels up to Rosy's bedroom door every now and then, to listen if she was awake and getting up. But that young lady was very tired with her long

journey, and it was full ten o'clock before she appeared in the dining-room to take her solitary breakfast, her father having insisted that they should not wait for her. Little Whymper was here, there, and everywhere—jumping upon the chairs, rubbing himself upon the sofas, running just under people's feet,

barking, frisking, jumping, wagging his tail, almost mad with excitement, for Ellen had given him the first holiday he had had since he entered Bollanw, and this is how he showed his extreme gratitude. She had been afraid of losing him, and so had shut him up in a spare room, where she went herself to feed and pet him two or three times a day. But Rosy said, "What a shame! Poor little thing! he will never get used to the place if you keep him so close a prisoner as that—how can he?" So Ellen let him out next morning.

As soon as Rosy was ready she prepared to take her for a walk, and of course they bent their steps towards the scene of last evening—the running mountain stream with its natural bridge formed by the tree. Rosy knew the place well—it was one of her favourite spots. All the way there Ellen was telling her friend about the fairy prince and what he had done for her. But Rosy only shook her head and laughed.

"Why, you imaginative girl," she said to Ellen, "I would never have believed you could have made up such a romance as this. You've been reading fairy-tales until your head is completely turned. I always think fairy-tales are stupid—such a parcel of stories, you know—not a bit real. You don't mean to say

that you actually believe you ever saw this Prince What-is-it? Ah! ah! ah!" and she laughed till her sides ached at the idea.

While Ellen earnestly protested that indeed she had really seen and talked to him only the last time yesterday night, although for some little while before that she had not been able to see him, because the fairy queen put something on her eyes while she was asleep.

"Oh, you silly little thing," said Rosy. "You have been dreaming all this while. But now I've come to wake you up—and quite time to, I think, that *somebody* drove this fantastic nonsense out of your foolish little noddle. You mustn't expect me to fall in love with this fairy prince of yours—he's not big enough for me, thank goodness, though he seems to have enchanted you, Mistress Ellen. Never mind my laughing, dear; but come along, we will soon find this magic place where the magic beads were spilled. And perhaps, after all, if we can but put them together again, and I see the charm work just once, I may be *converted*, and ready to do a service to the high dignitaries of Fairyland for such another bracelet myself."

Ellen looked serious a moment, then joined in her friend's fun. "I will show my beads to you, perhaps

bind them on your arm, when we can thread them again, and if you are very good, you shall wish something, and see how quickly you will get it."

"That's a bargain," said Rosy; "and here we are at the exact spot. Who shall go over the tree first, you or I? But why do I ask, since the fairy Princess Follow-my-Lead should always take the precedence of her humble ——" And she stood aside with a very low bow, a mischievous light darting into her laughing blue eyes, to let her friend pass by; but soon as Ellen was near the middle of the stream Rosy jumped on a certain large bough which hung over the water, and clinging to another above it with both hands made the bridge swerve from side to side as she sang—

"‘ Rock a bye, baby, on the tree-top,
When the wind blows—— ’

Mind you don't fall, Ellen. You were nearly in then."

For our young friend had sprang to the bank, very pale and trembling a little, but out of the reach of Rosy's mischief.

"Don't be angry, dear," she said to Ellen when she joined her again. "We'll have a jolly search together—see if I don't find the missing links before you." And chatting like this, full of jest and laughter, they commenced their search.

One hour, two hours, had passed away, and found them still there ; but the zest had died out of Rosy's face, and a more serious expression fallen upon Ellen's, as they turned their steps homeward, convinced that the two lost beads must have been carried away by the stream.

That same evening Ellen brought the eighteen beads with her to Rosy's room for her to see, and she, being as usual in a mischievous mood, stole one and hid it in her own jewel-case, intending to tease Ellen about it next day.

That night, after lying awake many hours thinking what she had better do, Ellen fell asleep at last, and found herself suddenly transported into the meadows of Fairyland, where she seemed to have come to gather daisies for Rosy. A bright crystal dome, more sparkling and brilliant than anything she had ever seen with her natural eyes, seemed to rise gradually through the earth, gathering solidity and size as it spread upwards, until a palace of great beauty stood before her, towering above the trees. Impelled by some outward force, she entered at once into the dazzling court of the fairy king's palace. There was a brilliant throne set immediately under the dome. A faint tinkling music, like the dripping of water on golden bells, coming nearer and nearer, and suddenly

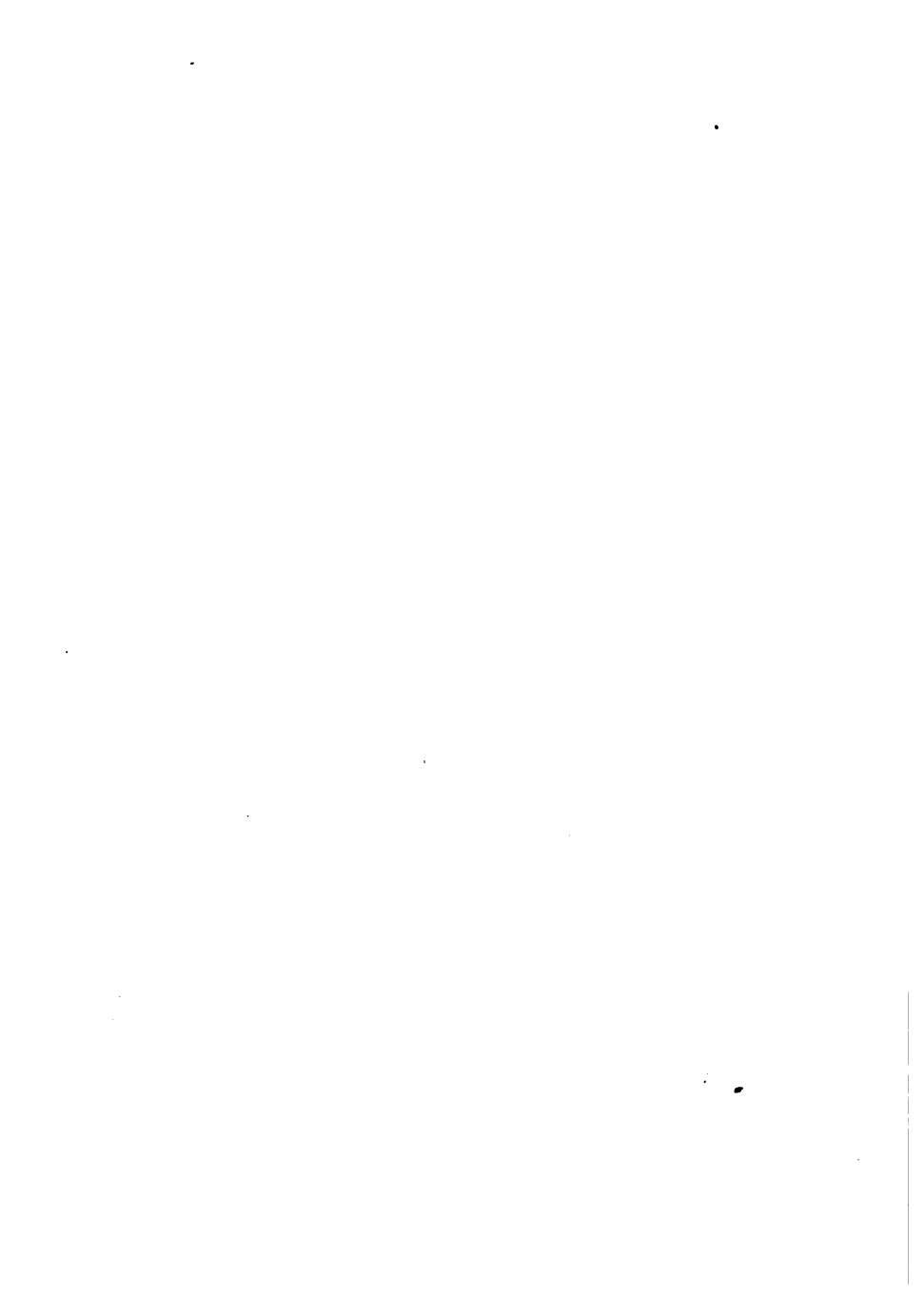
the fairy monarch and his queen came tripping from some distant hall, followed by innumerable other fairies, who, when the king had seated himself on the throne, divided themselves into two companies, on each side of their majesties, the lady fairies almost encircling the queen.

The music ceased, and as it did so, a most miserable black-looking lump of deformity began pulling itself along, by clutching with its claw-like hands whatever irregularity it could find in the smooth marble floor. It dragged its half-dead body to the last step of the throne, and lay there groaning. Then followed another and another and another, all exactly alike—Ellen counted eighteen of them—and the noise they made was something appalling. The queen glanced towards them angrily, and turning to the king made some remark to him which Ellen did not understand; but he spoke at once to a fairy who stood near him, at which he bent humbly to the ground, and Ellen recognised him for her old friend, Follow-my-Lead. The king spoke very sharply, his tiny voice cutting through the groans of the poor creatures at his feet like a diamond point through glass. Ellen distinctly heard all he said.

“And what excuse has the prince now to offer for thus persisting in torturing his fellow-creatures, now



"He spoke at once to a fairy who stood near him.



they cannot benefit any one more ?” demanded the king. “Would it not be better, since the bond of unity is broken—and the earth-maiden deserves punishment for her carelessness of so great a treasure—to recall those other sprites to their accustomed position in Fairyland? Bethink thee, prince. Thou owest this much to thy intercessor, Spitfire. These should of right be her slaves, and thou didst bind them to the will of an earth-maiden, to whom they rendered good service while bound together ; but the bond once broken, each has become so deformed and powerless, that the very scum of Fairyland may tread them under foot on the wayside, and they cannot defend themselves ; they cannot work, but only bewail their lot and suffer, while their two bond-fellows are rejoicing in having regained their freedom from a penalty—cruelly imposed by their adored prince—to humour the caprice of an ignorant earth-maiden.”

All the while the king was speaking Ellen observed that the poor prince kept his face buried in his hands as he knelt before the throne ; but when the king had finished, he gently raised his head, and as he did so the eighteen poor imps, who had been sighing and moaning softly until now, ceased altogether, evidently to listen to his reply and make it more distinctly heard.

“ I cannot recall a gift, your majesty. Were it only a matter that affected myself I would most willingly free these bondsmen of the beads. Your gracious majesty well knows that I am ready to undergo any personal pain, punishment, or inconvenience your justice may inflict—only let not your anger fall on the maiden who innocently holds the wills of these sprites. She is totally ignorant of their existence, therefore quite unable to judge of her power over them. She only associates the beads I gave her with some mysterious magical influence, derived from myself—a wonderful working power which is quite beyond her comprehension. That they answered her wishes she knew ; but that each separate bead had its own particular sprite, whose livelong duty it was to embody itself in its own special bead and rest there, ready to perform its allotted part of the owner's desire, she never even guessed. Therefore when the string which bound them together was sundered, she had no notion of the terrible distress which had fallen on these unhappy creatures, whose powers of action are yet bound to earth while their disorganised shadows linger mournfully in Fairyland. Spitfire, it is true, has released two of them, therefore the bond of action is broken ; but how to recall my gift to the earth-

maiden I know not, for am I not a prince in Fairy-land? And when did fairies beg to receive their own gifts again from the pollution of mortal use?" Then the prince once more bent down to the ground and hid his face in his hands.

For a few seconds all was silence. Ellen's heart ached for the poor prince. Too well now she understood the cause of his trouble. She made an effort to advance near and tell him that she would restore the beads at once—oh, how thankfully!—since they had brought this sorrow upon him. But all power of speech seemed to have deserted her. The quick pulsation of her heart almost stifled her. A thousand fairies appeared to encircle her and shut away the free air, while two bright, many-coloured sprites, each bearing in its arms a milk-white bead—Ellen's own bead, she recognised it immediately—came towards her, paused an instant as if pluming their wings for flight, then bowed down to her feet, rose in the air, and vanished; yet, as they faded out of sight, she could not help remarking that they cast a glance of scornful derision upon the poor black shapeless atoms which somehow bore a curious resemblance to themselves, although they were so bright and beautiful and mounted so gracefully into the brilliant atmosphere, and these wretched lumps of misery were obliged to

grope hand-over-hand along the marble floor, bemoaning their hard fate all the while.

The king and queen and all the bright fairy courtiers had disappeared. Only one living creature remained—the prostrate prince. Ellen longed to see him rise. Perhaps he had fallen asleep, he kept so still. She would try to wake him and——

“Ellen, Ellen, whatever is the matter, that you are making such a queer noise in your sleep? Do you feel ill?” And Ellen opened her eyes, to see Rosy standing by her bedside, and the bright sunlight streaming in full upon her.

Then she knew that she had only been dreaming; but all day long the remembrance of that vision clung to her and would not be shaken off, although Rosy was fuller of fun than ever, and brimming over with smiles and jests. At last Ellen found courage to tell her all about it.

Then Rosy said, “If I were you, I would throw those beads into the river where you lost the others, and forget you ever had them. Really, the worry caused by this precious fairy of yours will make you grow old, careworn, and wrinkled before long. I really believe I caught sight of a grey hair just now twisting in and out of one of your sunny curls. Throw the stupid old things away and have done

with them. Let's go and do it at once. I'll be ready in a few seconds."

"Very well," said Ellen; "but it makes my heart ache to part with them for all that. Many are the good turns they have done me; but they don't act now, so I suppose I may as well part with them." And tears gathered in her eyes at she thought, as she took the beads up tenderly and laid them in a tiny satin-lined basket which she could carry in her hand.

Then Rosy and she started out together towards the stream. When they arrived there she carefully made a soft nest of moss, and laid them one by one, counting them as she did so. Suddenly she turned to her friend—

"Rosy dear, there are only *seventeen* now. Do you think I can have dropped one on the road?"

"Perhaps you have," said her friend, with a merry twinkle in her eyes. "It can't possibly matter much now, since you've got to lose them all. You needn't look so pitiful about it—you silly little goose. Some stray fairy is sure to pick it up anyhow—so *you* needn't care." And Rosy laughed long and loudly at Ellen's concern.

Then they left the beads, and came home together arm-in-arm like sisters. That night Ellen dreamed herself into the same gorgeous palace under the same

brilliant dome. She saw the fairy king and queen again standing on the highest step of their throne, while thousands of myriad - coloured transparent fairies floated in one dazzling spreading cloud, and circling round the sparking pillars of the palace, and placing themselves at last in their several positions of honour—the whole forming, from Ellen's distant view, the shape of a five-pointed star, over which the colours of prism played like the spray of a fountain, the king and queen making a dazzling centre, with one of the star points directly over their heads and two others radiating from their feet, formed by prostrate sprites—leaving the marble steps clear for any suppliant who might come ; sweet music filled the whole atmosphere—merry voices chimed in ecstasy—an exquisitely delicate perfume fell like soft mist, pervading everything.

Presently in the far distance appeared a band of lovely sprites gently swaying with suppressed pleasure, as they made a straight line for the throne. The first, a lovely rose - coloured sprite, advanced before the fairy monarchs, bearing in her arms a milk-white bead. This she laid on the lowest steps of the throne, and gracefully bending before their majesties, withdrew to her place amongst those who circled round their heads. Then came a fairy of the same hue, but a trifle lighter in tint. She performed the same task,

and silently withdrew as the other had. This was enacted by each of the band—seventeen times in all, according to the number of beads they carried, until the last one had been laid in its place by the side of the others. Then a poor black-looking misshapen creature crawled humbly to the throne. It raised its voice, and a hideous sound issued from its huge open mouth. Ellen's heart beat fast. Something warm crept over her head—she put up her hand to touch it, and at the same instant opened her eyes. The moonlight streamed in at her bedroom window.

“Mew, mew,” said a plaintive voice, as Rosy's favourite Persian cat, which she had brought with her from London, rubbed her soft face against Ellen's cheek.

“Oh, what a fright you gave me, pussy!” she said, and took the purring creature down into the bed with her, hugging her close for company's sake. “I have been dreaming again, sure enough,” she thought; “but I'm so glad I've got rid of those beads. Anyhow, I'll search for the other to-morrow,” and after having decided where she would most likely find it, she fell asleep again; but this time no dreams disturbed her rest.

About nine o'clock Rosy stole softly into her bedroom, expecting to find her asleep, as she had done

the morning before. But this time she was disappointed. Ellen was lying wide awake, fondling Rosy's cat. So while she was dressing, she told her dream to Rosy, and how determined she was to find the missing bead that day if possible.

"I will spare you further trouble, darling," replied her mischievous friend, penitently. "Look—here it is," and she gave the stolen bead into Ellen's hand. "My heart smote me all the time for deceiving you. At first it was only for fun I secreted it. Then I thought you would not miss it, and the fairies you talked about, being only imaginations of your own brain, would of course forget it too. And then I hoped that I might tempt you to believe them to be only creations of your own fantastic thoughts. But since you seem so earnest about finding this precious bead, I am reduced to the painful necessity of giving it up at last. I hope it may restore peace to Fairyland, and what is more to my purpose, bring back happiness to my dear little Ellen's heart," and Rosy flew to her, seized her in her arms, and violently hugged her.

Ellen was overcome with pleasure. Now the poor little black imp would be restored to liberty, while her friend Follow-my-Lead would regain his proper position and rank in Fairyland. He would no more

be under the censure of their king or the suspicion of other princes ; and therefore she resolved to take the first opportunity, after breakfast was over, of visiting the same nest again, where she had laid the other beads.

But this was not to be. A letter lay on the breakfast-table awaiting Ellen's perusal. After examining the writing outside with wondering eyes for a long time, she found courage to break the seal and begin to read—at first with curiosity, gradually deepening into amazement, as the full meaning of its contents dawned upon her mind. The old gentleman who had taken Aer Hall was dangerously ill, it said, owing to the continual state of excitement which had been kept up ever since Ellen and her grandma left. Most unaccountable noises had been heard all over the house from midnight until dawn. One night he was lifted, bed-clothes and all, fairly up in the air, and shot out of his own chamber door into the cold marble-paved corridor, all in a heap. It was frightfully dark ; he shouted for the servants. They being disturbed by his cries for help, imagined that the house was on fire, and flew downstairs, candles in hand, his daughters rushing from their rooms at the same instant, and nobody looking or thinking about where they were going—in their excitement and terror ran against

each other, and falling at last on to the bed where the poor old gentleman lay floundering, their candles were extinguished. They began wrestling with each other, in their fright every one imagining that he was struggling with a thief: skins were bruised, heads broken, ankles sprained—never was such a scene of confusion before. When some one at last came with a light, the poor old gentleman was nearly smashed and half dead with suffocation, besides being terribly bruised; but the most annoying part of it all was, that merry peals of laughter rang on all sides of them, as if the doers of the mischief were enjoying the spectacle immensely. No one went to bed again that night, and the master was taken to the Rectory at Noake on a litter next morning by four men, all of whom wore a bandage or two apiece. It was a mournful procession, and very melancholy they all looked. So the Vicar had written for him to say that, directly he was well enough to return to his mansion in London, he should commence a lawsuit against Ellen for damages and fraud, unless she immediately refunded the money he had paid over to her for fixtures and advanced rent.

Ellen turned very pale as she read this letter, and Rosy's father being at the table, and seeing her altered face, asked if she had had bad news.

"Ah yes, indeed, sir," said Ellen. "Will you please to read this letter? I can hardly understand it. No one ever complained of strange things happening in the house before. I'm quite sure I never heard any unusual voice there myself."

Rosy's father took the letter; but before he had got half through it, he burst into a fit of laughter. "It must have been as good as a pantomime to see them all tumbling over each other on the old fellow's bed; and so annoying to be laughed at, while they thought it was such a serious business. Ah, ah, ah! Decidedly the best thing they could do was to get out of it at once. But I'm afraid you'll have to return and try to smooth matters over with him. He is evidently very much annoyed and out of temper about it, so writing would possibly only make matters worse. I've no doubt he's a little bit cracked, or he wouldn't have imagined such nonsense. No doubt you will be obliged to refund some of his money; but I daresay it will not be so serious in reality as it looks at the distance—things seldom are."

"I will start to-day," said Ellen—"the sooner the better. May Rosy go with me, sir? I shall feel much more brave over it if I have her for a companion. Please, sir, let her."

"Only on one condition," he replied; "that you

return with her to London as soon as this business is settled."

Ellen smiled a pleased acceptance of his invitation, and hurried off to tell Rosy to prepare for their long journey.

As she was packing a thought came over her that the one bead must be taken to its little mossy nest by the fallen tree. "I will run off at once by myself," she said; "if I call Rosy, it will only hinder time," so throwing on her cloak and hat, she ran hastily up the mountain path.

Scarcely had she started before she found herself at the exact spot, and kneeling down, laid the last bead n.

Was it fancy, or did she really hear distant peals of music? She held her breath to listen. Her heart felt very light, as though a great weight had been suddenly lifted off it. She could scarcely help laughing aloud, so merry and free from care did she feel. Ah, the reason was only too evident. Follow-my-Lead himself was quietly looking at her from one of the branches of the fallen tree. She had not seen him, although it was quite evident that he had been watching her for some time.

"Fair lady," said the little man, in a soft voice, "I congratulate you on your renewed power of

vision," for now she could by some mystic power see him and hear him perfectly well. "My imps were incensed at your absence from Aer Hall, after they had worked so hard at the place to make it a fit habitation for their honoured mistress, so, without my knowledge, they ill-treated the old man who seemed to be usurping your place. I cannot really blame them, dainty lady, in preferring you to all the masters in the world"—and he bowed his little figure very low as he spoke. "I will take care that all things shall be set right for your return. You possess the casket to supply all *real* needs. Go, and be happy. I return to my duties in Fairyland. The province which calls me ruler has got into a terrible state of entanglement during my imprisonment, and henceforth your path lies clear and bright as any human being's can be. Yet I would have you remember, especially in any time of trouble or annoyance, that you have always a *friend* in Fairyland. Farewell."

"I wonder if he has gone for good," thought Ellen, as the little figure vanished. "I hope I shall see him again some-day."

But as month after month passed after she had returned to her pleasant home, this whole past history began to appear impossible—as a dream. The realities

of life closed more closely around her, until they shut out all but a very faint remembrance of fairies and Fairyland.

When she first arrived home, she found the old gentleman rapidly recovering. His doctor had fully persuaded him that supernatural beings had nothing whatever to do with his illness. He must have been walking in his sleep, and dragged his bed to the door, but fallen upon it in the last effort of pushing it through. Ellen was very glad to accept this version of affairs, and willingly paid back all the money he demanded. So they parted the best of friends.

Rosy stayed with Ellen for about a month; and then, taking grandma, as they both called Dame Margery, with them, they turned their faces towards London.

A great change came over the old lady when she arrived there. If she was young before, she was absolutely *youthful* now. Every day made a difference in her appearance, much to Ellen's surprise; but she noticed it more particularly when Rosy's father was present. Still she was so much taken up with her own gaieties, that when Dame Margery told her that she intended changing her name very soon, it almost took away her breath with surprise.

"Going to change your name, grandma—whatever

for? Nobody knows you here, and if they did, how would it matter?"

"You foolish child, to misunderstand me so," replied the grandma, tapping Ellen's shoulder playfully with her fan, for they had both just finished dressing for a concert. "I am going to be *married*, of course."

"*No*, grandma?" said Ellen, with difficulty restraining herself from laughing at the absurdity of the thing. "You *don't* mean it? Whom to?"

"Can't you guess?" replied the bride-elect, with dignity.

"*Never* to Rosy's father?" said Ellen, the truth flashing suddenly upon her. "Never to Rosy's father?"

"Yes, my dear," answered the Dame. "Why should it surprise you so much? I thought at least that you would say you were glad; but there's no gratitude in this world," and she walked indignantly from the room.

"Well, I never!" said Ellen. "What *will* Rosy say? And it's all my fault for bringing her up to London."

"Rosy *has heard* everything," said a quick voice behind her. "I don't know that I care much;" but the quivering of her under lip told a different tale, and she turned her face quickly away from Ellen. "Pa must do as he likes, of course, and if grandma—I beg

her pardon—Dame Margery, doesn't like me, I must find a home somewhere else."

"My home shall be *your* home, darling," said Ellen, clasping her in her arms. "We will live together, and do just as we like, with no one to check us at all. I'm glad now they *are* going to be married, because I can have you all to myself—my own darling Rosy."

"The carriage is at the door. Don't you hear pa calling us, dear?" Rosy said. "We'll go down together. Flee away, black Care, until to-morrow. To-night we will enjoy ourselves and be merry." And linking arm-in-arm, they came lightly down the stairs.

Soon after this Dame Margery changed her name. But she always treated both girls with equal kindness. Sometimes they were with her in London enjoying every gaiety that gay place affords. Sometimes they were entertaining their own friends at Aer Hall.

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